

A romantic couple is shown in a close embrace, nearly kissing. The man, with short brown hair, is on the right, leaning towards the woman on the left. The woman has dark hair and is wearing a white dress with a red floral pattern. They are lying on a bed with a yellow and orange patterned blanket. The background is a soft, out-of-focus wall.

Loose Id

Sugar and Spice

L I Z A N D R E W S

SUGAR AND SPICE

Liz Andrews

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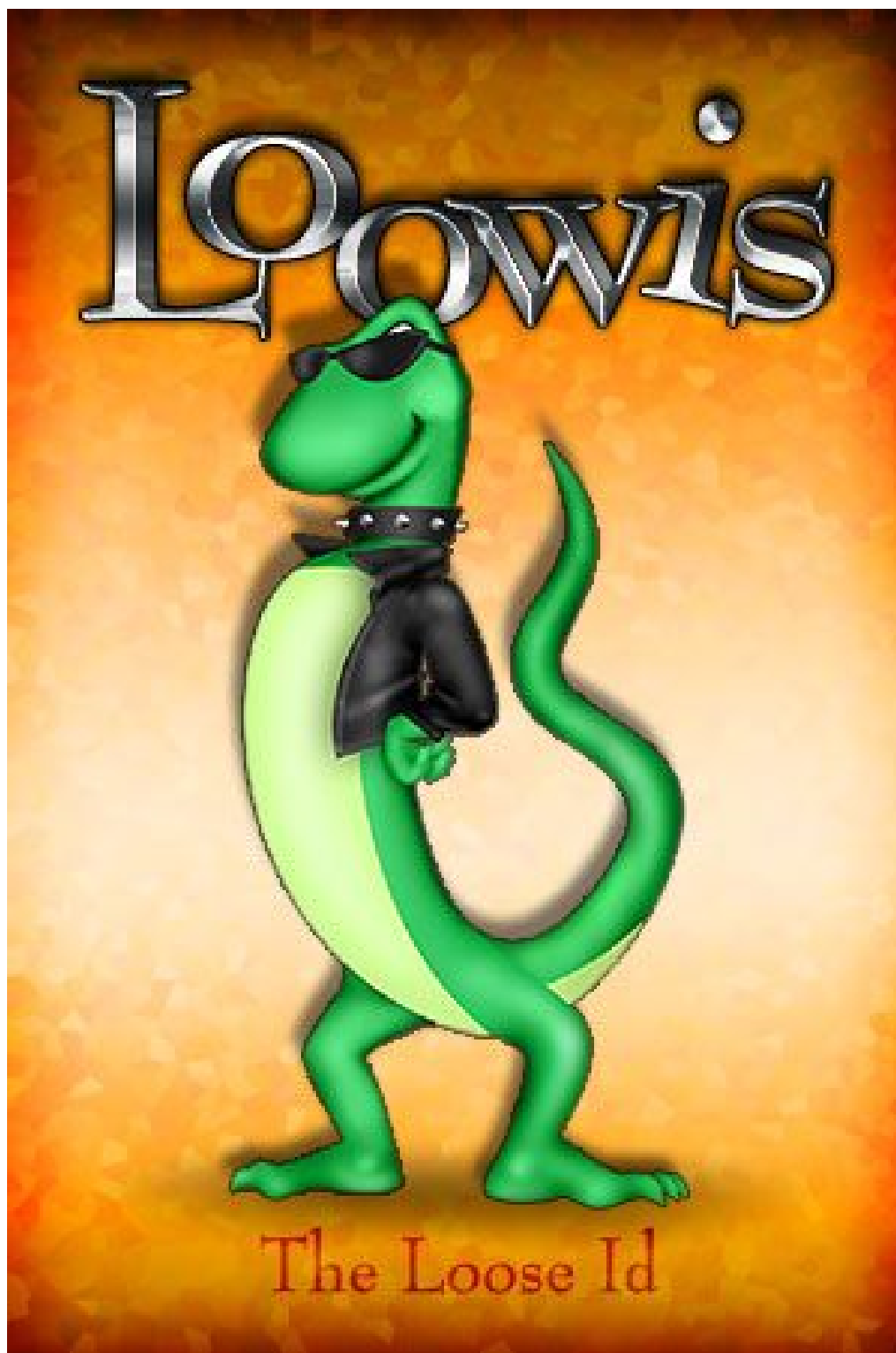
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Chapter One

Scott Marsten rounded the corner of Elm and Main with his Weimaraner, Shamus, pulling at the leash held tightly in his hand. His dog was just as eager to get to The Essence of Life as he was.

He'd discovered the tiny café just a few blocks from his home soon after he'd moved to Manitou Springs. The arts district where he'd made his home was known for its friendly, open atmosphere. The café was no exception and exuded a homey ambiance that was a stark contrast to the impersonal chrome-covered coffeehouse chains found on every other corner. The shop sold healthy snacks, sandwiches, and herbal brews; although none of those items were the draw for his continued return.

He was more interested in the owner, Rayne Jankowski, than the green tea or wheat germ muffins. In fact, the intriguing woman was the one reason he continued to return, day after day. He pushed open the door, and the object of his attention looked up from where she stood at the register.

"I'll be right with you." Turning back to her landlord, Mr. Thomas, she pleaded, "Don't you think you could give Mr. Petrelli just a bit more time?"

"He's already two months behind."

Rayne pressed a brownie into his hands, urging him to eat. "His wife is feeling much better now. It won't take him long to get caught up."

"I don't know..." The older man bit into the brownie and chewed thoughtfully. "Well, I suppose a couple more months won't matter."

Her face lit up like a Christmas tree. "Thank you so much, Mr. Thomas. I know he'll appreciate your generosity."

He harrumphed and nodded his head. "I suppose. I'll just go next door and give him the good news." Stomping past Scott as if he didn't even see him, he exited the café.

"Good morning," Rayne said, a warm smile wreathing her pretty face as she came around the counter to greet them. She had mahogany hair, cut short to frame her cheery oval face and sparkling brown eyes that never seemed to find anything wrong with the world. To his mind though, her sensuous curves were her most appealing quality.

"What was that all about?"

She waved her hand negligibly. "Oh, nothing. Mr. Petrelli's a bit late on his rent for the flower shop. I just pointed out how useless it would be to break the lease since he'd eventually get paid."

"Is he normally so *pleasant*?"

"Oh, he's not so bad. He just needed the right persuasion."

"I guess your brownie did it."

"Who knows, but enough about him." She bent to pet Shamus, allowing him to lick her face. "How's my good boy this morning?"

"Very excited to see you." He wasn't only talking about the dog either. His early morning jogs to Rayne's café had become a ritual as much as his newly acquired hatred for Monday. It was the only day of the week the café was closed, and the one time he didn't have an excuse to see her. This was why he'd decided to take the variable out of the equation and ask her out on a date.

“Aww, that’s sweet. He’s such a lover. Just remember, if anyone else comes in, you’re blind.”

It was a running joke between the two of them that if the health department ever decided to make a surprise visit, he would have to suddenly develop a case of blindness. The first day he stopped by, he’d tied Shamus up outside to come in and buy a bottle of water. She’d chastised him about his treatment of the dog and insisted he bring him inside.

“Believe me, I won’t forget.”

“You better not.”

“Trust me. I wouldn’t risk anything happening to you or the café for anything in the world.”

“Really?” She stood back up and cocked her head to the side to study him.

“Of course. Where would I get my muffins if you were closed down?”

“Hmm, good question.” She walked behind the counter and headed toward the kitchen. “I’ll be right back. I need to wash my hands.”

The second she drifted behind the swinging door, Scott cursed under his breath. *Muffins! What the hell? What an idiot.*

Shamus barked, as if agreeing with his master’s silent censure.

“No one asked you.”

“Asked who?” Rayne inquired as she walked back into the room.

“Nothing. Just talking to Shamus.”

“Is he holding up his end of the conversation?”

“Always.”

“Good boy.” Grinning, she headed to the bakery case and reached for the bag she always had waiting. The first day he’d stopped in, she had offered him a sample of her muffins. Not wanting to be rude, he took the sweet, proclaiming it delicious, and had

returned every day since. Not for her snacks though, but for the opportunity to see her. She always saved a little tidbit for him from her early morning baking. And he shamelessly took advantage of her largess to get to know her better.

Rayne intrigued him. At first glance she looked like a throwback to the sixties, with her peasant skirts and health food ways, but he'd found her to be an astute businesswoman as well. She opened the café every morning after preparing the baked goods for the day, and he was usually her first customer. During their uninterrupted time together, she spoke to him about her dreams for the café.

When she began her business it was just a bakery and tea shop, but she'd told him about how she'd immediately wanted to expand it into a café. Within three months of opening, she added sandwiches and other deli items. She would relate to him how she wanted to take the next step and expand into a full-service restaurant. Of course that would require more space, additional staff, and an influx of capital. She had even showed him her business plan and timeline for implementation, and he was more than impressed with her business acumen.

Their conversations gradually turned from business to personal. They both had eclectic musical taste, and they enjoyed summer nights and the first signs of fall. In time she became something of a fixture in his life, and he wanted to see if they still had the same chemistry outside their early morning conversations.

Before he lost his nerve, he blurted out the question that had plagued him for days. "Rayne, I was wondering if you wanted to go out with me this weekend?"

A soft gasp escaped her, and she lost her grip on the white bakery bag. Moving quickly, he reached out and grabbed it before it hit the floor. Obviously, his invitation had caught her off guard.

"You want to go out with *me*?"

She clearly had no perception of her own attraction, which made absolutely no sense to him. Scott knew for a fact that plenty of people came into her café simply because of her. Personally, he found her attractive, in all her quirky goodness. Although she wasn't what some might consider a classic beauty, she had an inner glow, one that shone through with all her kind actions.

"Yes, of course. I wouldn't have asked otherwise."

She smiled tentatively. "Then I'd love to."

"Great, how about tonight? I'll pick you up a half hour after you close." He knew from their discussions she lived in the apartment above her store.

"Make it an hour. I'll need the time to make myself look presentable."

He raked his gaze over her lush body and shook his head in disbelief. She could be dressed in sackcloth and look good.

"I'll give you the hour, but you won't need it. You look good just as you are right now."

She blushed at his compliment. "Thanks, but after working all day it's doubtful I'll look the same at five o'clock tonight."

"Well don't worry too much. I thought we could go see one of the concerts in the park."

Her eyes lit up. "I've always wanted to go to one of those."

"Excellent." The bell above the door jangled, announcing the arrival of a customer.

Bobby Jeffries came in, quickly followed by Juan Garcia. The two young boys attended the Catholic school just down the street, and they often stopped in for a treat in the morning before the first bell.

"Hey Rayne, what do you have for us today?" Juan queried.

"If I remember correctly, you boys have a spelling test next week, so I made something extra special for you."

The two boys nodded, their eyes alight with excitement. Rayne reached under the bakery counter and pulled out two small squares wrapped in cellophane. Their excited expressions fell as they saw what she'd produced.

"Kinda small, aren't they?" Bobby, the more outspoken of the two boys, spoke up.

Rayne glanced around and then leaned in close, lowering her voice. "These are extra special, filled with super smart boosters to help you when you study so when you take the test you'll be able to concentrate harder. But I had to make them small, because they pack a big punch. Too much and your brains could explode."

The boys' eyes widened, and they reached out to each tentatively take the small sweets she offered.

"Thanks, Rayne," Juan said shyly.

"Yeah, thanks," Bobby called over his shoulder as the two boys ran out.

"Do you ever sell anything?"

She laughed and nodded. "Yes, of course. Only certain friends get my special treatment."

"I'm glad I can count myself as one of those friends."

Rayne ducked her head, and Scott could have sworn she was blushing. Before he could press the point however, the bell announced another entrance, a mother with two young children in tow. His plan for continued seduction seemed doomed to fail this morning.

"I better get going, but I'll see you later."

Rayne smiled gratefully and waved before turning her attention to the newest customer. Scott dragged his reluctant dog out the door, and together the two of them headed back toward home.

* * * * *

We're going out tonight. She'd been able to contain her outward show of excitement while he'd been here, but Rayne was feeling giddy. After three months of subtle flirting, he'd finally asked her out. Her, the chubby bakery owner, and him, the guy who liked to run. Would wonders never cease?

Her attraction to Scott had been immediate. While she'd never believed in love at first sight, lust at first sight was definitely something she'd experienced upon seeing him walk into her shop at the beginning of the summer.

His T-shirt had been sweat soaked and clung to his chest, outlining his well-defined muscles. He was tall, with sun-kissed brown hair and hazel eyes she simply couldn't stop staring at. She remembered her mouth had gone dry at the sight of him, and she'd stood as if in shock when he asked if she sold bottled water. She hadn't restocked the case, and none of the bottles were cold, so she offered him some of her special blend iced tea instead.

When he explained he couldn't stay long because of his dog, she convinced him to bring Shamus into the shop. She loved animals, and if it allowed her to stare at Scott a few minutes longer, she was more than willing to slightly bend the health codes. She'd even given him a sample muffin before he left, hoping to entice him to return.

Her ploy worked, and he'd been back every day since, stopping by during his morning jog. She began making special baked items, just for him. And every day he took her sweets with a smile and returned again the next morning.

It had been fun to flirt with him day after day, but never in a million years did she ever expect he'd actually want to date her. Although she sold health food, she basically avoided exercise at all costs whereas he was a daily jogger. When he asked her out this morning, she'd been shocked into speechlessness.

"Oh boy, something's going on." Lucy Howell looked at Rayne expectantly. It seemed everyone in the neighborhood knew she was interested in Scott except for him.

"We're going out tonight," she admitted with pride.

“Oh Rayne, that’s so great.” Lucy pulled her into a hug she returned cheerfully. She loved this type of community solidarity, where neighbors looked out for each other and everyone celebrated together.

“I never thought he’d figure out I was interested in him.”

Lucy pulled back in shock. “How could he not? You’ve been leaving breadcrumbs to your bedroom door all damn summer.”

“Come on, be serious. Just because I made a special something for him *every...single...day...*” The two women burst into laughter. “Okay, so maybe my subtle hints finally made it through.”

“Sounds like someone is having a good day already,” Josie Weston, her counter assistant, commented as she arrived, swinging her backpack onto the counter.

Josie worked part-time while attending a nearby college. The dark-skinned African American woman was very responsible, and Rayne felt lucky to have her working at her café. A bit older than the usual college student, she was quiet and kept to herself. She had snappy russet-colored eyes and wore her hair naturally in tiny twisted ’locs.

“Scott finally asked her out,” Lucy shared.

“Woo hoo, it’s about time.” Josie lifted her hand for a high five, and Rayne returned the gesture.

“Personally, I still can’t believe it. I mean I’m me, and he’s well...him.”

“Am I going to have to beat you?” Josie crossed her arms over her chest and tried for a menacing look, although she didn’t quite capture the meanness she was probably aiming for. “Girl, you are cute and funny and people love you. He apparently likes what he sees or else he wouldn’t have asked you out. The boy knows what he wants; instead of second guessing it, you should be over the moon.”

“I suppose you’re right. Every morning when I was baking I’d fantasize about him asking me out, but I just never thought it would actually happen.”

The bell over the door announced another customer, and Josie quickly stashed her backpack beneath the display case.

"I'll take care of the counter. Why don't you sit and discuss the details, like what you're going to wear," Josie said as she shooed them away.

While the children played happily, Rayne poured some tea, and she and Lucy settled themselves on one of the overstuffed velvet settees. The room practically invited customers to stay and socialize, unlike other cafés where people sat at tables typing away on their laptops, oblivious to everyone around them. She prided herself on the fact it reminded her of a living room rather than a restaurant.

"So, what are you going to wear?"

She pondered Lucy's question for a moment. "We're going to a concert in the park, so something comfortable."

"Just remember you can be sexy and comfortable at the same time."

"Yes, Mom."

"I doubt your mother would be trying to talk you into his bed the way I have."

She didn't respond, mainly because Lucy was dead wrong. Her mother was a free spirit who believed in the "make love not war" philosophy. If that wasn't bad enough, her mom was obsessed with magical brews. She'd probably be telling her what kind of love potion produced multiple orgasms in men. *Nope, definitely not going to share that tidbit with her friend.* No use letting the entire neighborhood know about her kooky family.

"Hey, enough about me. What's going on with Jeff?"

A shadow passed over Lucy's face, and she glanced over her shoulder at her children before turning back to Rayne.

"He still doesn't think his drinking is a problem. He thinks he can cut down, drink only beer instead of whiskey, and everything will be okay."

"Oh Luce, I'm so sorry. Have you thought about Al-Anon?"

Her eyes shuttered, and she shook her head. "I don't think I could do that."

Rayne wanted to shake her. She wished she could give her friend some backbone. Unfortunately, Lucy's home situation had beaten down her self-confidence to the point where she was afraid of her own shadow. Her visits to the café were practically the only times she ever left the house. Rayne stood and headed over to the bakery case. She felt the need to share a carob brownie with Lucy.

"How about a treat?"

Lucy looked indecisive, but Rayne returned to the sofa and pressed the brownie into her hand. She sat and began nibbling on her own square. Finally acquiescing, her friend began to eat as well.

"It's pretty tasty, even if it isn't real chocolate."

"Hey, no disparaging my treats. Carob is healthier for you."

Lucy leaned forward and pulled her into a hug. "Thank you so much. I appreciate all you've done."

"I really haven't done anything."

"Yes, you have. You've been a friend and listened to me."

"Any time." She truly meant what she said. The friends she'd made more than outweighed any business. It was just luck that had her bottom line in the black every month. Well, luck and a lot of hard work. Nevertheless, she cherished the friendships she had made in Manitou Springs.

The women continued to talk for a while longer, but Lucy left when her little one began to show signs of tiredness. After Lucy departed, business picked up as people stopped by on their way to work. Eventually the crowd thinned out and settled into the slow time between early morning customers and the lunch crowd. She left Josie to handle the counter alone while she headed into the back to get some accounting work done.

She was disturbed just a few moments later though by knocking at her delivery door. Peeking through the security glass, she saw her brother, Forrest, standing there. She swung open the door and threw herself into his arms.

Although born of the same parents, they looked nothing alike. He had olive-toned skin and dark, almost black hair, which he wore too long for her taste. In contrast, his eyes were a light gray. He was very tall and well built from years of hard labor.

“Whoa. Hey, Rainbow baby, what’s with the exuberant greeting?”

“Don’t call me that.” She smacked him in the back of the head before hugging him tight once again. “Can’t a sister be happy to see her brother? Especially one who she hasn’t seen in almost a year.”

“It hasn’t been that long.”

Yes, it had. She hadn’t seen him since Christmas, and it was almost autumn now. Her family was scattered around the globe, but they always tried to get together for the holidays.

Finally pulling away, Rayne scowled at him. “Okay, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong.” Forrest avoided her penetrating gaze and started exploring the kitchen. “You have a really nice place here.”

“Yo, loser. Did you forget who you’re talking to here? I know you, big brother, and you don’t show up out of the blue unless something’s wrong.”

He grimaced and leaned back against the counter. “I forgot how damned persistent you can be.”

She crossed her arms and tapped her foot. “I’m waiting.” Although she was acting pissed off, frankly she was worried. Forrest rarely did anything without a reason and usually had no problem telling anyone and everyone what it might be.

He sighed heavily. “I lost my job, okay. The carnival wasn’t doing too well, and fortune-telling doesn’t pay as well as it used to.” The sarcasm in his voice said more than the

words. His job wasn't the most profitable of careers. Things must be worse for him than she realized.

She had a feeling he wasn't telling her the whole story, but it was enough of the truth that she was willing to take his explanation at face value, for now. "Okay, you can bunk in my spare room and start work today with the lunch crowd."

"Start work?"

"Please, you need a job and you came to visit me. I'm not an idiot and neither are you. You grew up in Mom's kitchen just like I did, and I know you can make a mean honey oat muffin."

"I didn't come to visit because I'm a charity case."

"Who said you did? I've been overwhelmed for the last six months. Now I finally get to take a day off."

He pulled her into his arms for a quick hug. "Thanks, Sis."

"No problem. Besides, you're going to be working so hard I bet you won't be thanking me in a week." She dug her keys out of her pocket and handed them to her brother. "Why don't you take your stuff upstairs, and I'll see you in a bit."

Rayne headed back into the main part of the café while her brother headed upstairs. She hadn't been lying when she said she needed help. It was as if he'd come at just the right time. But that wasn't surprising. Forrest had always had a knack for knowing things. Which made his job as a fortune-teller a piece of cake. He knew about things before they happened and had flashes of insight.

In fact, her entire family had paranormal powers -- everyone except her, that is. Well, that wasn't strictly true. Her father didn't have any powers, although it was hard to tell since he was so intuitive. Rayne figured she must be a throwback to his side of the family, but her mother insisted that wasn't the case. Alas, she would soon be thirty, and as far as she could tell the mysterious powers were never going to show up.

It was one of the reasons she'd moved from home to start her business. She might not have any special powers here, but she had an important place within her neighborhood. And she was going out on a date tonight. Life was good.

Chapter Two

The park was busy with activity when Scott and Rayne arrived for their date. He'd picked her up at her apartment, and due to the unusually warm weather, they decided to walk to the park instead of drive. Rather than immediately finding seats, they walked around a bit to take in the sights.

Vendors had set up food and craft stands around the park. They strolled along the manmade aisles, checking out the stalls. Scott wondered if Rayne would even eat any of the junk food sold at these places.

"How did you decide to open a health food café?"

"Growing up, all we ate was healthy food, and I learned a lot of recipes. I loved to cook, so it seemed like a perfect fit."

"But didn't you tell me one time your family lived down south somewhere? Why didn't you open something there?"

Rayne cocked her head and smiled. "I guess it's like those kids who want to go away for college. I needed a break from my family, and I needed to prove I could do it all on my own."

"You've certainly done that."

"Thanks."

“So are you a vegetarian, or can I interest you in a corn dog?”

She grimaced. “Strictly speaking, no I’m not, but I don’t know if an unknown meat product is what I should be eating. Besides, these hips don’t need anything deep fried.”

Frankly, Scott liked her hips just the way they were. He could imagine his hands grasping the generous flesh as he drove himself deep into her pussy. Just that brief thought had him aching to get her naked.

“You’re right, your hips don’t need a thing; they’re perfect, just like the rest of you. But still, you can’t go to these places without eating some junk.”

She hesitated for a moment, but finally allowed him to drag her toward the food vendors. “Fine, I’ll have a corn dog. And some fresh-squeezed lemonade sounds good.”

“All right. Two corn dogs and two lemonades. Then we’ll get a funnel cake for dessert.”

“Dessert?” She sounded aghast at the suggestion. “You’re going to have to roll me home after all this.”

“Come on, funnel cake is the best. Fried dough and powdered sugar. It’s to die for.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” she said, her voice laden with sarcasm.

“I promise, after tonight you can go back to your evil granola ways. One night won’t kill you.”

“Evil granola?”

“It’s the vilest.”

“Vilest.” A hint of a smile danced over her lips. “Okay, if I’m going to be bad, I might as well go whole hog.”

“That’s the spirit.”

He paid for the food, handing her share to her. “Tell me more about your family.”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know. Tell me something I don’t know.”

“That’s a bit broad.”

“Oh ho, ho.” Scott stopped walking and turned and faced her. “Are you implying that after all this time, I know nothing about you?”

“Why don’t you tell me what you think you know.”

“Think. Ha. I bet I know more about you, Rayne Jankowski, than you know about me.”

“Sounds like a challenge. You’re on.”

“First, I know you come from a big family. You have two brothers and two sisters.”

Her eyes widened in surprise. “How do you know --”

“Are you conceding already?”

“Never.” She grinned. “You’re an only child.”

“All right, point for both of us. You’re twenty-nine years old. You’re allergic to cats, and you like things with color, the bolder the better.” He discovered that little tidbit tonight. As they walked past the different booths, she picked up the most colorful item on the table. It didn’t matter if it was a painting, jewelry, or a tacky picture frame, she was inevitably drawn to the brightest in the bunch.

“You’re thirty-two. You love dogs, and your favorite relative is your aunt Annette.”

“Okay, how did you know about Aunt Annette?”

“I tell, you tell.”

“Deal.”

“You’ve mentioned her a time or two.”

“But what makes you think she’s my favorite?”

“Because she’s the only relative you mention continuously. Sure, you’ve said this and that about your parents, but she’s the only one you’ve ever spoken about that brings this childlike smile to your face.”

“Childlike, huh?”

“She’s like Disneyland and the Cartoon Network for you all rolled into one.”

“She’s one in a million, that’s for sure.” Never married, his aunt Annette had doted on him since he was a child. He’d spent summers at her house, allegedly to help out with chores and yard work, but really to help her with her special projects. She was always having a tarot card reading for her friends or séance to contact the dead. He’d somehow known his parents wouldn’t understand his aunt’s idiosyncrasies, so they’d been a secret between the two of them.

“Now your turn. Spill.”

“You’ve also mentioned your family a time or two. By name, I’m sure, but I don’t recall what they are right now. You shoo away cats like they carry the plague whenever they come near the shop, and every time we stopped at a booth today, you lightly caressed the bright items.”

“I love color. What can I say?”

“I’d love to see how your place is decorated.”

She stopped and stared at him for a moment. “Is that a subtle way of asking if you’ll be invited up tonight?”

Shocked, he realized how his comment might have sounded, and although he wasn’t opposed to the idea of the night ending at her place, he didn’t want her to think that’s what he expected. “That’s not what I meant.”

She laughed. “Oh God, you should see your expression. You look positively stricken.”

“Really, I only meant I’d love to see how you decorated because of your fascination with colors.”

“It’s okay; I understood the first time. I just thought I’d give you a hard time. I had no idea you’d fall into the trap so well.”

His gaze narrowed. “Paybacks are a bitch.”

“Oooh, I’m scared.” Somehow, she didn’t seem scared at all.

“Pretend all you like. Just remember, I’m waiting for the perfect opportunity.”

“You can try.” She pulled away from him, back toward the food stalls. “Didn’t you promise me some dessert?”

“So I did.” He bought them a funnel cake to share, and they finally headed over to the grandstand. The band was a local one, but they had a loyal following. Fortunately, Scott was able to find two seats about halfway to the stage.

As the lights lowered and the music started, he wrapped his arm around her, pulling her into his embrace. She snuggled in close, laying her hand on his thigh as they sat there listening to the band. He tried to concentrate on the music instead of the feel of her fingers as they tapped along to the melodies. The band had a good mix of fast and slow tunes, and Scott and Rayne both were familiar enough with at least a few of the songs to sing along.

Throughout the concert, she held the paper plate as they nibbled pieces of the funnel cake. There were only a few bites left when he picked up a piece she’d been reaching for and popped it into her mouth. Her eyes rounded as she began to chew.

“You have a bit of powdered sugar on your lip,” he whispered.

Her tongue darted out and she licked her lips, but she was unable to reach the sugary substance. “Did I get it?”

“No, here, let me help.”

He took the plate from her hands and placed it on the ground. Then holding her face in his hands, he bent his head, capturing her mouth in a kiss. Her lips parted for his, and his tongue swept inside. She tasted like the sweetness of the powdered sugar, but had an underlying appeal all her own. He could feel her hand grasp his shoulder as she returned his kiss, her tongue dueling with his.

The crowd erupted into applause, and he pulled back from her, realizing the concert was over. Although the crowd was chanting for an encore, he could only concentrate on

Rayne. Her eyes were glazed and her breathing labored, but she smiled tentatively at him. “So, ready to see my decorating job?”

He immediately knew she was inviting him back to her apartment, and he was more than willing to see where tonight would lead. Standing, he took her hand in his. “Let’s go.”

* * * * *

As they climbed the stairs to her apartment, Rayne was eager and filled with anticipation. Their bantering tonight had been fun, especially knowing their connection existed outside the confines of early mornings in the café. During the concert she had felt so comfortable in his arms. When he had taken the initiative to kiss her, she knew she was ready for their relationship to go further.

She had kissed many men in her life, but never had any of them affected her like he had. His lips on hers had sent an electric charge through her body. The rest of the audience had melted away. Her focus was centered totally on him and the feelings he was evoking. She wouldn’t have quibbled a bit if he had stripped her bare right then and there.

As she wrestled with the key to her apartment, she wondered where tonight might take them. *Would he be a generous lover? Was he passionate in bed? Would he...*

“Change your mind?”

Sheepishly, Rayne glanced up at Scott, embarrassed she had been caught fantasizing about their first time together instead of actually opening the door so they could live it out. Not wanting him to get the wrong idea and leave, she smiled and shook her head. “Nope, not at all.” With a renewed vigor, she unlocked the door to her apartment and ushered him inside.

Nervously, she turned on the light and shut the door, giving herself a few more minutes to gather her wits. After locking the deadbolt, she turned to face him. Instead of getting undressed like she’d hope, he was standing in the middle of the room, with hands in his pockets, looking around. “Nice place.”

“Thanks.” She tried to perceive the room from a stranger’s point of view. There was a faint smell of yeast and cinnamon from the bakery that permeated the room. The walls were painted a warm yellow and decorated with accents of red. Her furniture was all dark woods, but the room was large enough to handle the bold colors. Thankfully, her landlord allowed her to paint, because the sterile white walls would have sent her into a depression after two weeks.

“So what can you tell from my decorating?” Rayne took off her jacket, dropped it onto the floor, and walked purposely toward him.

“You’re very close to your family.”

“You already knew that.”

Scott flopped onto the extra wide chair and pulled her down onto his lap. “True, but if I didn’t, this room would have told me in a heartbeat.”

Looking around, she could see why he said that. She had pictures of her family everywhere. They were especially prominent across the mantel of her fireplace. She loved the older photos most of all, the slightly wrinkled sepia-toned ones of her great-grandparents. But thoughts of her family weren’t what interested her right now. She was more fascinated with the hardness she felt under her ass.

“Scott, don’t take this the wrong way, okay?”

“Okay...”

“But I don’t want to talk about my family anymore tonight.”

“Then what do you want to talk about?”

“That’s just it.” She lowered her gaze coyly. “I don’t want to talk.”

Slowly, she began to slip the buttons from their holes on his shirt, exposing his chest to her hungry gaze. She’d seen him covered in a tight T-shirt, but never bare-chested. It was a sight to behold. She spread his shirt and ran her hands over his chiseled torso. How this

handsome man was interested in her was beyond her scope of understanding, but she wasn't about to question her good fortune.

While she concentrated on her discovery, Scott's hand had crept beneath her skirt and was now resting on her thigh. The feel of his callused palm on her soft flesh made her want to experience more. She leaned forward to kiss him.

The moment her lips touched his, his hand tightened on her leg as he explored her mouth. He urged her off his lap for a moment, only to turn her slightly before pulling her back down. This time, however, he spread her legs wide until she was straddling him. The apex of her thighs was now aligned with his cock, which was straining against his zipper.

His hands delved beneath her T-shirt, and he quickly had her bra unhooked. Not bothering to remove the garment, he pushed it up and out of the way. Rayne's eyes closed as the sensations rushed over her. He cupped her breasts and kneaded the soft flesh as his thumbs brushed over her hardening nipples.

"Hmm, that feels so good."

"Do you like this?" He pinched her nipples, bringing them to tight peaks.

Shivers of delight coursed along her body, and she could barely speak. "Ahh...yes, I like."

He chuckled as he continued to tease and torment her sensitive nubs. She could feel the pull all the way to her pussy, and she shifted restlessly on him.

"Stop moving."

"I can't help it." His touch had her pleasure centers whirling out of control. She wanted it all and she wanted it now.

"Lift your arms for me."

She obeyed him immediately, and, he pulled her T-shirt off and then quickly divested her of the bra as well. Although she'd allowed him to disrobe her, she felt vulnerable sitting there topless while he was completely clothed. Especially when her plus-sized body was in

full view. She crossed her arms over her chest and stomach, trying to camouflage what she didn't want him to notice. Fortunately, he quickly quelled her doubts.

"None of that now." He pulled her arms wide and leaned forward to capture one of the turgid peaks in his mouth, nibbling at the swollen tip before lathing it with his tongue. He released her arms, and her hands grasped at his shoulders. The solid feel of his cock beneath her had her rocking her now-aching pussy against him.

Rayne never heard the front door opening, but she was startled by the sound of her brother calling her name.

"Rainbow baby, what's the...oh shit, sorry."

"What the fuck?" Scott erupted in indignation.

"Oh my God." This was a nightmare. How in the world did she forget her brother was staying with her? It wasn't as if she was prudish when it came to nudity; she'd grown up on a commune for Pete's sakes. But dancing around naked as a kid and getting caught by her brother while going to second base were two different things.

Rayne valiantly attempted to cover herself as Scott struggled to assist her and stand at the same time. It was a futile effort at best. "Who the hell are you?"

"Hey man, I'm sorry." Forrest stood across the room, his back to them both as he shifted from foot to foot. "I'm Forrest, the older brother."

Embarrassed beyond belief, Rayne climbed from Scott's lap and wrestled with her T-shirt as she pulled it back over her head. Her bra was nowhere to be found, but she couldn't worry about it at the moment. She was too busy being thoroughly humiliated. Scott was looking less homicidal, and if she wasn't mistaken, perhaps a bit embarrassed as well.

"Yeah, hi. Scott, the potential boyfriend." Scott's words, although a bit sardonic, sent a surge of joy through her. Sure, this might only be their first date, but his words had her hopeful they'd both been hiding their secret attraction to one another for a lot longer.

“My brother is staying with me for a while. He came to help out in the café since I’ve been so busy lately.” Her explanation took only a few seconds, but Scott’s attention was back on her, and she could still see desire smoldering in his eyes.

He pulled her into his arms and bent his head close to her ear. “Thank God he’s your brother, or I swear he’d be a dead man.”

Rayne struggled not to burst into laughter. This man was not only strangely attracted to her, but he could take disappointment in stride. What a great guy.

“Like I said before, I’m sorry. I didn’t know you’d have company.” Forrest threw the apology over his shoulder as he continued to stare intently in the other direction.

“I just forgot you were even going to be here.” She should leave him staring at the wall all night, but truthfully, he hadn’t done anything wrong. “You can turn around now.”

Forrest twisted back sheepishly. “I could just go...” He gestured toward the spare bedroom.

“No, I think it’s time I was going.” Scott took her hand and headed toward the door. “It was nice meeting you.”

The words were polite, but the tone was stilted, and Rayne silently commended him on his control. Inside she was raging at her brother and the loss of opportunity, but Scott was right. They might as well call it a night and try again another day.

“Yeah, nice meeting you too. I’m heading off to bed.” Forrest beat it down the hallway double time. She really shouldn’t be amused, but it was kind of funny that her brother was more embarrassed than she was. Of course, she was feeling much more confident now that she had her shirt back on.

When they reached the door, she turned to Scott with a smile of regret. “I’m sorry about how tonight ended.”

He stepped closer, backing her against the doorway and pressing his thick erection against her. She could feel the length of him and moaned in disappointment.

“Tonight isn’t the end. It’s only the beginning. I want to see you again.”

“I’d like that.”

He bent his head and captured her mouth. She wrapped her arms around his neck and returned the kiss, pouring all her pent-up desire into the embrace. His hands gripped her ass and pulled her even closer, as if he could incorporate her into his own body. With a reluctant groan, he released her.

“I’ll see you tomorrow morning.”

Rayne couldn’t speak, so she just nodded. He opened the door and headed down the stairs, turning to wave once he finally reached the bottom, and left. Shutting the door, she leaned back against the heavy oak, her hand caressing her bruised lips. She didn’t know how she was going to sleep tonight as keyed up as she was.

Chapter Three

When Scott walked into The Essence of Life the next morning, he immediately looked for Rayne, but she was nowhere to be seen. Which was highly unusual. In fact, he couldn't think of a single instance when she hadn't been front and center first thing in the morning. Instead, her brother was holding court at the bakery counter.

Three women surrounded the glass display case as Forrest rambled on about the benefits of fiber and honey oat muffins. The ladies all looked at him adoringly, although Scott wondered if they weren't more interested in the man than the muffins. Of course, he didn't have much room to talk. He'd taken a muffin from Rayne every morning for the last three months just to get close to her.

Forrest looked up and paused in his health lecture for a moment. "She's in the kitchen. Go on back." He jerked his head toward the swinging door before returning his attention to his groupies.

Scott walked around the counter, thanking his lucky stars he'd left Shamus at home this morning. Having the dog in the café was one thing, taking him into the kitchen was something else entirely. He didn't want Rayne to have to try and explain that scenario.

The kitchen was bigger than he'd expected, but no less organized than the front. To his delight, Rayne was bent over, checking something in the oven. Her full hips swayed back and forth slightly, covered only by a soft cotton skirt, and the sight immediately brought his cock to attention.

He imagined taking her in this position, slipping into her welcoming warmth as she pushed back against him. The picture in his head reflected the direction of his thoughts since last night. She was in his mind constantly, the idea of them together an ongoing fantasy he couldn't shake. And frankly one he didn't want to.

As she stood, he continued to take in the sight of her lovely body, showcased in a low-cut shirt, highlighting her bounty. Her breasts were perfect, as he'd previously thought and had confirmed last night. Some might consider them more than a handful, but to his mind they fit his hands as if they were made for him alone to hold. His wayward remembrances had not only awakened his cock, but had tented his trousers to the point he had to shift to adjust himself.

His movements drew her attention, and she glanced over her shoulder, breaking into a smile when she saw him.

"Hey there."

He walked over to the ovens, leaning against the nearby counter. "Hi yourself. What are you baking?"

She pulled the pan from the oven, and he could see they were some kind of muffins. The tops were sprinkled with oats and, surprisingly, what looked like sugar.

"These are a Forrest creation. Except he cheats."

"Cheats?"

"Yeah, he uses more sugar than necessary."

She set the pan on the cooling rack and stepped up close. When she reached around him, he almost groaned as her hands brushed across his abdomen. He didn't know if she was unaware of what she was doing, or teasing him on purpose.

"And sugar is bad?" He wrapped his arms around her waist, effectively trapping her against his body. He liked the feel of her softness in his arms.

"Refined sugar." She stared up at him, her eyes twinkling. "I have something for you."

He leaned down, his mouth covering hers hungrily. He'd been wanting to do this from the moment he'd set eyes on her today. Since the moment he opened his eyes this morning, in fact. Reacquainting himself with her unique taste was a task he didn't take lightly. He explored her mouth thoroughly before finally releasing her a few moments later.

"I like your gift very much."

"Uh...that wasn't my gift." Bringing her arm between them, she presented him with a muffin she'd taken off the counter. "Specially made, just for you."

Reclaiming her lips, he kissed her again. Her desire-filled eyes and labored breath told him just how affected she'd been by their kiss.

"I think I like your lips better."

"Me too." Shaking her head, she blushed and pulled out of his arms. "I mean I like your lips."

"Does that imply you're willing to ditch this place for one day and come out with me?"

"More than willing. Forrest is trained on the register, and Josie should be in soon to show him the ropes. I'm free for the entire day."

"Good." He took the muffin from her hands. "Where would you like to go?"

"Do you really want to know?" She looked hesitant, as if she was afraid he might not want to go where she suggested.

“Yes, I do. I don’t care what we do or where we go. I just want to be with you.” Although he might be fantasizing about getting her into bed, any time he was able to spend with her would be precious.

“Then how does your place sound?”

“Wonderful.” *Thank you, God.* They were more than on the same wavelength. How he had wasted three months before asking her out he’d never know.

“You don’t think I’m being too...forward? You know, taking the lead?”

“Honey, I don’t care who drives as long as we end up at the same destination.”

“Which is?”

“My bed. I’m an only child. So we won’t get any grand family surprises walking in my door.”

“I like the way you think.”

“I like...well hell...I like every damned thing about you.”

She blushed. “Sweet talker.”

“I’m telling it like it is. Come on. Let’s get out of here.”

Ten minutes later Scott opened the door to his condo and ushered Rayne inside. Shamus anxiously greeted them at the door, and Scott quickly let the dog outside to the small patch of grass in his yard.

He watched Rayne looking around his place and wondered what she was thinking. Although he’d only lived there three months, he’d tried to put his stamp on the place. The walls were painted a soothing green sage, and the earth tones in the furniture made the room feel serene after a long day at work.

“I love your place.”

He didn’t realize he’d been holding his breath waiting for her reaction. “Thanks. I still want to do some work in the loft, but it’s coming along nicely.”

She glanced up and gasped. “Oh wow, I didn’t realize you had all that extra space. Very cool.”

“Do you want to see it?” He asked to be polite, but now that they were in his house, a bed just a few feet away, there was really only one thing on his mind. Her beneath him.

She walked toward him, shaking her head. “Ah, no. I’m sure you can give me the grand tour later. I have a much better idea in mind for the next hour.”

“Only an hour?”

“Hmm, well I’m up for whatever time you’re willing to give me.”

“I’m just up.”

She laughed at his double entendre. “Really? Let’s see.”

As she stepped closer to him, she pressed her body against his. One hand was on his shoulder, but the other hand began exploring, stroking down his chest to his waist. Her fingers moved lower to cup his growing erection through his jeans. He groaned in reaction and pushed his hips toward her.

“Hmm, you are up, aren’t you?”

Before he knew what she was doing, Rayne dropped to her knees. She unbuttoned his pants then glanced up at him mischievously as she slowly pulled down his zipper.

“Tease,” he murmured as he brushed the back of his hand against her cheek.

“No teasing here.” After parting the opening of his pants, she pulled them, along with his boxer briefs, down to his ankles. His erection sprung forth, hard and ready for whatever lay ahead.

Licking her lips, she took him in her warm hand. “Is this for me?”

“Most definitely.”

“I’m a lucky girl.” Smiling, she leaned forward and pressed her lips against his abdomen, branding his flesh with feathery kisses before stopping at the jutting erection

begging for her attention. She didn't leave him wanting for long. Boldly, she licked the tip of his cock before taking him deep within her mouth.

"No, I'm the lucky one." He groaned and closed his eyes, surrendering himself to her talented tongue.

There was nothing tentative about the way she explored him. She was as bold in her loving as she was in everything else she did. Grasping him, stroking him, driving him mad with the pleasure of her touch. If her oral skills were anything to go by, she was going to be spectacular in bed.

Without a doubt, the little hellion could bring him off with just a swipe of her tongue. But he wasn't a selfish lover; there would be other times for him to find his release between her lips. Grasping her hair in his hand, he reluctantly but gently stepped back.

"What..." Rayne glanced up at him, eyes glazed over with passion. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"Then why did you stop me?"

"Because it's my turn to play."

Any other time Rayne might have been upset at having the object of her attention removed, but she was more than in favor of allowing him all the playtime he wanted. In fact, she'd been anticipating making love with him long before he ever asked her out.

"What kind of games do you play?"

Scott's low chuckle had the warmth in her belly spreading lower, infusing her pussy with need. If he could affect her this much with his laughter, she was in for a world of trouble when they got down to the loving.

He grasped her hand, pulling Rayne to her feet. "I like all kinds of games, the dirtier the better."

"I like the way you think."

With his gaze firmly locked onto hers, he toed off his shoes and then stepped out of his pants and kicked them away. “And I just flat like everything about you.”

The husky tone of his voice had her creaming. “The feeling is mutual.”

“There’s going to be lots of feeling today, Rayne, and I promise you, it will be more than mutual.”

Surprising her with his quickness, he picked her up in his arms.

“What...no, you can’t.” He was going to throw out his back in his attempt to play the he-man, but her words fell on deaf ears.

“I can and I did, so hush.” He strode down the hall while she held tightly to his neck to avoid falling. When he reached the last room, he pushed open the door to reveal what she assumed was his bedroom.

The room was the epitome of masculinity, decorated in chocolate browns and heavy wood furniture. The large bed dominated the room. Scott set her down in the middle of the bed. Lying back, she made herself comfortable as she watched him strip off his shirt to reveal his muscled chest. He pulled off his socks, freeing himself of his last remaining item of clothing.

“You’re a bit overdressed, don’t you think?”

“Definitely.” She sat up, her fingers on the buttons of her blouse, but he joined her on the bed, covering her hand with his own.

“No, let me.”

He unbuttoned her blouse, exposing her one inch at a time. Although she wore a bra, it was a wisp of nothing lace that barely covered the fullness she possessed. Her nipples puckered as they were exposed to the cool air.

“Hmm, I like this treasure.”

He leaned down and captured her taut peak between his lips, sucking it into his mouth. A muffled groan escaped her as the pull at her nipple tugged the nerves all the way down to

her clit. She arched into him and wrapped her fingers into his hair, pulling his head closer to her.

She dropped her head back and surrendered herself to him. “Mmm...”

While he nibbled at one breast, he cupped the soft weight of the other in his hand as his nimble fingers tugged and pinched the sensitive tip. The stimulation of her nipples was almost too much for her body to take. She wanted him to stop, she wanted more, she wanted to come, she just wanted.

“I don’t think I can take much more.”

Scott released her breast and stared into her eyes. “We’ve only just started.”

He quickly pushed the blouse off her shoulders and stripped her of her bra. Her body was flushed with desire, and she noticed he was not unaffected by her either. His cock was hard and jutting slightly away from his body, the top slightly glistening with precum. She reached out and brushed the tip of him, covering her fingers with his fluids.

“Son of a bitch.” He jerked back.

Startled, she stammered an apology. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean...”

“No, baby, don’t apologize.” He took her chin in his hand, tilted her face toward him, and stared deeply into her eyes. “I love you touching me. But right now” -- he closed his eyes and took a deep breath before opening them again -- “I don’t think I’d last two more seconds with your hands on me.”

“I just wanted to taste you.” She sucked her fingers into her mouth and savored what she’d been after.

“That is so fucking sexy.”

She couldn’t help the burst of feminine pleasure she experienced at his words. For the first time in a long time, she felt sexy. Felt like a sexual being even, and not just like a handy fuck buddy. He didn’t want to have sex with the lights off. In fact, he was more than willing

to see her in the light of day and wasn't shy about it. With Scott, she was free to do and be herself, as quirky or as kinky as she desired. And she wanted to reward him for it.

"What are you thinking about?"

"You," she answered honestly.

"That's what I want to hear." He winked. "Lift up for me."

She quickly complied, and he tugged her skirt down over her hips and off her legs before tossing it over his shoulder. Now, lying before him on the bed clad only in her lace panties, she felt very sensual. He gazed at her as if he was a starving man and she was the first meal he'd seen in a long while.

"Like what you see?"

His eyes flared with passion. "God yes, you're a feast for the eyes."

He climbed onto the bed and hooked his fingers in the elastic band of her panties, tugging them off her body and pulling them down her legs. Shivers raced through her as he trailed his fingers up her legs, and her body anticipated his touch in the one spot she craved it the most.

Just then, however, he pulled back.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong, I just want you to show me what you like."

"What are you talking about?"

"Touch yourself for me. Show me what gets you off."

Although she realized it was a natural act, she'd never masturbated in front of a man before. But when she sensed the current of excitement from him, her nervousness slipped away, replaced with the confidence of a woman who knew she was desired. Scooting back, she propped up the pillows and leaned against them sensuously. She could get used to a man who was interested in her participation in the bedroom.

Lightly, she trailed her fingers over her collarbone. Although she thought he probably figured she'd immediately begin with her pussy, she planned to give him the full show. If he really wanted to know what she liked, she wasn't going to pass up the opportunity.

She moved her hands under her breasts, cupping and massaging the soft flesh. Her nipples were already puckered from his earlier attention, but her own fingers drew them into tighter buds. Her eyes fluttered closed as she sank into the caress.

"No, don't close your eyes. I want to see how this is affecting you."

"I...I usually close my eyes."

"Why?"

At first she wasn't sure how to answer his question. It was just the way things happened. But thinking about what he was asking, she realized she knew why.

"I'm fantasizing. I imagine it's someone else touching me."

"I want you to keep your eyes open and watch me while you touch yourself. Fantasize about me."

His order heightened her arousal. Knowing he would be looking was one thing, but seeing her actions reflected in his eyes made her want to make it just as good for him as it was going to be for her. And boy was it going to be good. She was turned on beyond belief, and they had only just gotten started.

Licking her lips, she met his gaze, knowing he was staring at her as she caressed her heated flesh. She squeezed her nipples, the pinches starting lightly, but eventually becoming firmer and harder. As she rolled the berry peaks between her fingers, she could feel the pull deep in her center. Her breathing began to quicken, and she knew she wouldn't be able to avoid her pussy any longer.

With practiced ease, she moved a hand down her body and along her rounded stomach. As she reached the juncture of her thighs, her legs fell open. She took a deep breath

and slid her middle finger up and down the seam of her pussy, finding the moisture gathering there and spreading it around the lips.

“Are you wet?”

She nodded her head.

“Tell me.”

“I’m so wet, my fingers are already soaked.”

“Good.”

As she stroked the creamy flesh, she stared at Scott intently. His gaze alternated between her hands. One was still on her left breast, pinching the nipple, while the other dipped between her lower lips. She moved between thrusting her fingers inside and grazing her clit. Her senses were on overload.

“You like it, don’t you, fucking yourself for me?”

She lowered her gaze seductively. “Yes, and so do you.”

“You’re damned right I do. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything so sexy in my whole life. You have me hard as a stone.”

He wasn’t exaggerating at all. She could see he was not only primed and ready to go, but his cock was also leaking precum. As if noticing her gaze locked on his shaft, he took a hold of himself and began stroking it. *Oh yeah, this was a lot of fun.*

She felt so sexy, fingering herself while he watched. It was one of the most exciting things she’d ever done. Her hips began to move as she sped up her movements. Releasing her breast, she grasped the sheets under her, needing the feel of an anchor as her stimulation grew.

“Yeah, baby, that’s it. Fuck yourself. You look so beautiful right now. Tell me what you’re thinking.”

“You’re fingering me, but it’s not enough.” Her breathing hitched, and she struggled to continue relating the fantasy. “You’re licking me, sucking my clit, rubbing my G-spot. I can’t breathe. I want to come so badly it literally hurts. I need it.”

“What do you need?”

“To come. Come hard. Come for you.”

“I love the sound of that, almost as much as I love watching you toy with that sweet pussy of yours.”

Good lord. The more he talked the more turned on she became. It was insane the way her body was reacting to him.

“That’s right. Fuck yourself for me.”

“Scott!” Disobeying his previous order, she closed her eyes and surrendered to the madness sweeping over her. The restlessness she felt could no longer be contained. Her legs shifted, and her hips were now pushing back against her thrusting hand. She wanted to come, badly. As if reading her mind, he reached out and stilled her hand.

“My turn.”

Chapter Four

He'd exerted more control in the last few minutes than he ever had in his entire life. Watching Rayne touching herself was a double-edged sword. Sure, he enjoyed the show, but he had to force himself not to stop her sooner. She wasn't pleased when he put a halt to her play.

"Oh God, I was so close."

"We have all day, remember?"

She whimpered in need and lifted her hips toward him as if in invitation. It was one he was hard pressed to turn down. He took the hand she'd just had between her legs, brought it to his lips, and sucked her damp fingers into his mouth. The taste of her spicy essence was intoxicating. He definitely wanted more. He released her hand and moved between her legs, trailing his fingers through her moisture to her slick opening and pushing two fingers inside her pussy.

"Oh fuck." Her hands grasped at the sheets, and she planted her feet on the bed to arch her back into his caress.

"Which do you like better, your hand fucking this hot box or mine?"

“Yours, yours.” She seemed frantic, writhing under his touch, pushing back against his hand.

He pulled his fingers back, stroking the edges of her opening. “So you’d be upset if I stopped.”

“Scott, please, don’t tease me.”

“But it’s so much fun.”

“Is it?” Rayne sat up and moved her tempting pussy out of his reach. “Then maybe I should have a bit of fun myself, if that’s what it takes.”

She reached out and grasped his throbbing cock in her hand. From the way she licked her lips, he knew he was in for a world of pleasure, but still he stopped her. This was his show, and he would run it the way he wanted. Gritting his teeth, he took her wrist in his hand and stopped her from stroking him. “I don’t think so. We’re going to play my way.”

“Says who?”

“Me.” Even though it killed him, he removed her hand and nudged her back onto her back. “Lie back and enjoy the ride. There’s one thing I’ve always noticed about you, Rayne. You carry way too much responsibility on these very sexy shoulders of yours. With me you can let go.”

“Can I?”

“Yes,” he replied with all seriousness. “I’ll take care of all your needs. Your pleasure, your pain.”

“Pain?”

“Only the good, sexy kind.” He winked. “Follow my instructions and I’ll take care of the rest.”

“Sounds good to me.”

“I want you to stretch your arms out and grasp the headboard.”

“Yes, sir.” She reached up and behind her and gripped the wood in her hands, all the while maintaining eye contact. From the lust-filled gaze she sent his way, Scott could tell she was as into this game as he was.

“A man can get used to a response like that.”

“A woman can get used to responding that way.”

“Lord, I hope so.”

“Now what?”

“Now I feast. You gave me a taste, and it whetted my appetite.” He pushed her legs apart so she was open to him and moved between them. “But now I have to soothe my savage beast, and your sweet pussy is what’s on the menu.”

She groaned as he brushed his lips along her inner thigh teasingly. He kissed his way up to her waiting pussy, but then pulled away and moved to her other leg. Slowly, he moved his way up her thigh until he reached her opening, then he stopped and blew gently.

She shuddered and moaned. “Oh God, I don’t know if I can take it.” She slid her fingers into his hair and pushed him closer toward her clit.

He almost gave into her demands, but first he wanted her to acknowledge just who was in control here. Pulling away from her hands, he sat up and moved over her to look into her eyes.

“Did I tell you it was okay to let go of the headboard?”

“Scott, please.” Her urgency for him was almost his undoing.

“Not yet baby, not yet.”

He positioned her hands above her head once again before moving back between her legs and lowering his lips to lick at her softness, all the while still avoiding her clit. She tasted so good, sweet and spicy; he felt he could eat at her pussy all day. He continued to tease her until she was writhing and moaning on the bed. Finally, he flicked his tongue over her clit, just once, and she jumped at the contact.

“You are so fucking responsive.”

When she didn't answer him he looked up from his position between her thighs. She was breathing heavily, her head pressed back against the pillow, her hands gripping tightly at the wooden slats above her head. Her eyes were closed, but the look of need on her face was like a match to a flame, igniting him.

Deciding to up the ante, he slid two fingers inside her until he found the special little spot and pressed firmly. He slid his mouth over her clit and sucked the engorged bundle of nerves between his lips, softly at first, then harder and firmer.

“Scott...yes...oh...” As he continued to suck harder and harder, she suddenly screamed as she came, her body bucking and writhing under his mouth.

He pulled back to gaze at the prize before him. Her legs were spread wide, and her eyes were open, giving him a come-hither look that could not be denied. When he moved off the bed and headed toward the bathroom, she suddenly sat up.

“Where are you going?”

Her frantic state was evident in her voice. He pulled open the cabinet drawer and grabbed a foil package from the box there.

Somewhat impatient, Rayne called out to him. “Come back here right now and fuck me.”

Scott laughed and headed back into the bedroom. Normally he preferred to be the one in control in the bedroom, but since they were on the same wavelength, he had no problem letting her order him around. Still, he thought she needed to wait just a bit.

“Scott, please...”

She lay back, shamelessly naked in front of him, her legs spread wide. Her pussy was wet and swollen, with a distinct smell of an aroused woman in the air. And in her eyes was a combination of desire, passion, and anticipation. She was looking at him with a longing bordering on desperation.

“Never let it be said I didn’t please a lady.”

He ripped open the foil package and rolled the condom over his straining erection. Although he’d enjoyed tempting and teasing her, he’d been doing the same to himself. It was time to stop the games. He knelt between her thighs and grasped his cock, centering it at her moist opening. She lifted her pelvis to meet his entering stroke, hooking an arm around his neck and dragging his lips down forcefully on top of hers. Her cry was a half whimper, half moan as he slid partially inside her.

She broke their kiss with a cry. “More, I need more.”

“All in good time.” He wanted this to last. The feel of her clasping the tip of his cock was heaven in and of itself.

“Please.” Her sob was his undoing, and he thrust forward, seating himself fully into her depths. He clenched his jaw at the rush of pleasure rocketing through his body. If he’d known making love with her would have been this intense, he would have asked her out much sooner. This was like coming home, back to the safest, most comforting place he’d ever been. He wanted to stay locked within her forever, but he also needed to move.

He pulled back slightly, eliciting a cry of distress.

“Don’t worry, baby. I’m not going anywhere.” He pushed back into her snug warmth.

“You better not.” She gasped the words, passion evident in her voice.

His control a thin thread, Scott tried to clear his mind of all the sensations coursing through his body.

“Give me your hands.”

Without question, she put her hands into his. He pulled them above her head and wrapped her fingers around the wooden headboard.

“Don’t let go.”

She nodded her head and licked her lips, her eyes boring into his. “Whatever you want.”

Her words fueled his desire. He began to fuck her then, starting with a steady thrusting. With every stroke, she pushed her hips up to meet him.

“Yes...fuck...oh shit...yes.” Her words were incoherent, but the basic meaning was more than understood.

He couldn’t hold out and began fucking her with abandon. No longer measured and controlled, but hard and fast. He dropped her legs, and she wrapped them around his back. She met his every thrust, gasping for breath, clutching the headboard as if it were a lifeline as he pistoned into her.

Suddenly she came, screaming his name as her pussy milked his cock while he continued to power into her. Her orgasm caused a chain reaction within him. He pushed into her and then stiffened, his body jerking as his own release electrified his body.

Tired, he forced himself to pull from her body and then collapsed next to her. He grabbed tissues from the bedside table and removed the condom. They lay there exhausted and replete, as if they’d both run a marathon. He’d known, somehow, when they came together it would be good, but he never expected it to be as great as this. Out of her body for scant minutes and he could feel himself hardening again just thinking about her.

She propped her head up, stroking her fingers down his chest and clasping his burgeoning erection. “So what do you have planned for the rest of the day?”

* * * * *

Rayne was walking on air. She and Scott had spent the entire morning in bed, exploring each other’s bodies with the intensity of students studying for a final exam. His mastery in the bedroom sent shivers of delight through her, even now, hours later.

They’d finally pulled themselves away from each other this afternoon, but only after she began to feel guilty for leaving Josie stuck with her brother all day. When she finally arrived at the shop, she was glad to see they hadn’t come to blows. In fact, the place was

bustling along nicely. Forrest finished up with the current customers before turning toward her with a welcoming smile.

“Hey, Sis, I didn’t expect to see you back today.”

Rayne’s face burned at his comments. She wasn’t embarrassed about spending the day in bed with Scott, but this was her brother. It wasn’t like she planned to discuss her sex life with him.

“Thought I’d just make sure things were going okay.”

“I haven’t killed him yet,” Josie deadpanned before she turned to help the next customer.

Forrest raised his brow at Josie’s back before turning his attention back to Rayne. “Not too bad for my first day’s work. A couple of people stopped by to see you. I can tell you they were pretty shocked when you weren’t here. You don’t get away from this place much, do you?”

She shrugged in resignation. “Not much. Starting a new business requires a lot of sweat equity. Which is why I’m so glad to see you, big brother. We’ve been getting by, but now you can help share the burden.”

“I didn’t want to say anything yesterday because I really do appreciate the help, but...”

“No, no, you’re helping me, really. I’ve needed more help for a long time now.”

“I believe you after today. If you kept going at this pace, you’d be crashing sooner rather than later.”

She leaned against the counter and rotated her neck. Just thinking about all the work she’d been doing the last few months made the stress and tension start to creep back. “You’re right. I should have hired someone a long time ago.”

“Ahhh, speaking of hiring, I hate to ask, but how much does the gig pay?”

“Good question. I need to take a look at the books and see what we can do. But don’t worry, you’ll get a good salary. Plus room and board too.”

Their conversation was put on hold due to the arrival of new customers. The three of them worked together quite well, and she was pleased to see her brother had even tried his hand at a few new treats. It was always good to keep adding new items to the menu. They continued to work until just past dinnertime when she finally flipped the sign over stating they were closed.

“It’s been a long day, Josie. My brother can help me clean up, why don’t you leave early?”

Josie looked as if she wanted to say something, but then glanced over at Forrest and nodded her head. “Sure, I’ll see you tomorrow.” She grabbed her backpack and headed out a few minutes later.

“Saturdays are getting busier and busier. It was a madhouse here today.” She and Josie had always just muddled through, but each day they had more customers.

“So I hear. Josie was telling me this area of town is the up-and-coming district. With all the new places opening up around here there will be a lot of shoppers who need a place to take a break and get some refreshments.”

“Well, I’m glad for the business, that’s for sure.”

They quickly cleaned the front of the café before moving back to the kitchen area. Working together, they were able to accomplish the task much quicker, and before she knew it the place was spotless.

Forrest poured them both a cup of hot tea and leaned back against the counter, obviously ready to take a break. “I’m surprised this business hasn’t been harder on you.”

Her brow furrowed in confusion. “What do you mean?”

“You’ve gotten to know almost the entire neighborhood. You know how I mentioned a couple of people stopped by to see you?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, they all wanted something. I could feel their need pulling at me. You know I’m pretty damned good at blocking, but it was like a constant drumbeat.”

“Oh my God, I’m so sorry. I never realized.”

Forrest shook his head. “That’s what’s surprising to me. They came looking for you, as if seeing you would fulfill their need. So, I don’t see why you’re not feeling it.”

“I’m not like the rest of you. I tried to explain it to Mom and Dad before I left. I think I must be the mutant of the family. I don’t have powers.” She spoke emphatically, ignoring the small tug at her heart. It was odd to admit out loud that she was different. But it was one of the reasons she’d moved away.

Constantly being asked if her powers had manifested was as draining as wishing and wondering what her powers might be. The idea that she didn’t have any powers was hard for her to admit but impossible for her family to even voice.

“Keep telling yourself that, Rainbow baby, but I don’t believe it.”

“Your disbelief doesn’t change the facts.”

“You know Mom was a little pissed you haven’t called lately, but at least now I can tell her how busy you’ve been.”

The guilt was delivered secondhand, but she still felt the weight. “I know I’ve been terrible about calling lately. Maybe you can catch me up on how everyone’s doing.”

Forrest refilled his cup and took a seat at the preparation table. “I’m not really sure what’s going on with Star. She moved to Southern California a few months ago. Something about working for a start-up magazine there.”

“What? Why didn’t anyone tell me she moved?”

“Umm, call once in a while and you might find out some of this stuff.”

Rayne picked up one of the unsold muffins and started nibbling. He was right. She had dropped the ball lately about talking to her family. Thankfully, he was here now, and with the added help she would make the time to reconnect with everyone.

“Okay, you’ve made your point. What about Phoenix?”

“He’s still living in Florida and avoiding the cops.”

Rayne winced in sympathy. Her brother Phoenix had helped with a police case in Florida regarding a serial killer. Things hadn’t turned out well, and since then he’d avoided any attempts by the local authorities to get involved with another case. “I should call him.”

Forrest nodded but refrained from commenting. “Harmony’s still living with Mom and Dad. She still can’t shield very well, and big crowds are just hellish for her.”

“Still?” Her parents and Harmony continued to live in Arizona on what used to be a thriving commune, the place where they all grew up. It used to be the perfect place for Harmony, who was in tune with the thoughts and feelings of those around her. Being around a large group of people was painful and harmful for her sister. The constant influx of information was so overpowering it almost drove her to the point of insanity. Now that the area around the commune was becoming a tourist attraction with a large golf and spa resort, Rayne wasn’t sure just how her sister was going to adjust. “Poor Harmony.”

“Yeah, it’s to the point Mom and Dad are worried she may never be able to leave.”

“Oh, Harm.” Rayne felt totally deflated. She had distanced herself from her family because she felt isolated due to her lack of powers. But they were still her family, and she hadn’t realized how far she’d let it go. She never meant to cut them out of her life to the point she didn’t know anything about them anymore.

“Don’t beat yourself up about it. Mom and Dad understood you needed to make it on your own. Remember, everything happens for a reason. We just don’t always know what that reason is.”

“I know, but...”

“Seriously, everyone understands. Call them tomorrow, talk to them. You’ll see. And now you can tell them all about your new boyfriend.”

Rayne rolled her eyes and stood, taking her cup to the sink. "Speaking of which, do you think you can work tomorrow? Scott and I were going to get together."

Forrest moved away from the counter and brought his own cup over to her. "Sure thing, Rainbow baby. Go play."

Rayne blushed and smacked him on the arm. "Shut up and stop calling me that."

Chapter Five

“So where are we going?”

Scott hadn't said much to Rayne about their destination beforehand, wanting it to be a surprise, but now that they were halfway there, it seemed almost pointless to keep it a secret. Besides, she would notice the road signs soon enough. “I thought we could go to the park.”

She glanced behind her in the direction of the city park they passed up a few blocks back. “You don't mean the park down the street, do you? I mean, I know men are afraid of asking directions, but you know...you passed it up.”

He chuckled to himself as he switched lanes. She was a crack up. “It's not that we don't like to ask, we technically can't. There was a pact they made us sign in school.”

“We were homeschooled. My poor brothers must have missed out.”

“Oh, no. I'm sure someone came by and gave them a form. State law, you see.”

“I guess.” She chuckled. “So, really, where are we going?”

“I was thinking since I've seen your job you might like to see mine.”

As the head ranger for the state park system, he was in charge of operations for Cheyenne Mountain state park. Her accompanying groan, however, had him rethinking his desire to show off.

"I'm not much of a hiker." She sounded almost apologetic.

"That's okay; we aren't going to be doing any hiking. I brought a picnic lunch and thought I could just show you around some of the new areas that aren't open to the public yet."

"You mean private areas we'd have all to ourselves?" Her voice had taken on a thoughtful seductive tone, and his mood began to improve almost immediately.

Now she was getting the picture. "Exactly."

"Hmm, I can't wait to see what you have to show me."

The drive took no time at all, and for the first time in his life, Scott was a bit disappointed in the close proximity of his job. He enjoyed the short drive over, which enabled them to talk uninterrupted by customers, adoring dogs, and ringing phones. Just the two of them, alone, free of any disruptions.

Every day he spent with her, he learned something new. She was like a wildflower come out to bloom, understated, but beautiful all the same.

They exited the car and walked hand in hand up a secluded trail as Scott ran a commentary about the scenery. He loved his job, and he wanted Rayne to see the beauty in the forest that he did. She was an attentive listener, asking questions and throwing in tidbits of her own knowledge. Although he chatted like a magpie, she never once looked bored. Either she really liked him, or she was extremely skilled at keeping her emotions at bay. He hoped it was the former.

When they finally reached the empty campground area, Scott spread a red and black checkerboard-design blanket underneath a shady tree and gestured for her to have a seat. The spot was perfect. Concealed from the regular hiking trails, it was a diamond in the rough. Most people passed right by it without knowing it even existed, which was exactly what he wanted. No one would disturb them here. They could be as wicked and wild as they wanted.

"We won't have weather like this for much longer," Rayne noted as she took a seat on the blanket and turned her face to the sun.

"That's the beauty of an Indian summer. All the warmth without the killer heat." Scott joined her on the blanket, kicking out his legs in front of him.

"So what's in the picnic basket?"

"That's a bit of a secret." Scott took his time planning this little outing. Everything in the basket had a dual purpose, and if he had his way, he'd feed her physical hungers as well as the carnal ones.

"Sounds very mysterious."

She had no idea. "Prepare to be dazzled." Reaching into the basket, he pulled out a chilled bottle of champagne, a plate of cheese, and a bowl of strawberries.

Her eyes lit up with delight. "Consider me dazzled."

He uncorked the bottle and poured them both a glass. She tilted the glass back, and he watched the white column of her throat as she swallowed the cool liquid.

With a seductive little smile, she leaned back on her elbows, pushing her breasts out as if in invitation. Damn she was beautiful, like a Rubens painting come to life. He wondered what she would do if he asked her to unbutton her sundress for him.

After taking the lid off the bowl, he removed a strawberry and pressed it to her closed lips. She opened her mouth to take a bite of the luscious fruit. "Hmm, delicious."

Yes, she was. He wanted to taste her like she tasted the red berry, savor her sweetness and devour her whole.

Some of the juice dripped from the side of her mouth, and without conscious thought he leaned forward to lick at the droplets. Although sweet, he knew her lips would be sweeter and moved to capture her mouth. She parted her lips to accept him. As they kissed, she reached up and wrapped an arm around his neck, holding him closer to her. Lost in her touch, he slowly lowered her to the blanket.

Her eager response roused his passions, but he had plans for their outing, and he didn't want to forgo anything. He reluctantly broke their kiss, but didn't immediately move away. Instead, he ran a finger along her jawline and down her throat to the opening at the top of her dress. With nimble fingers, he popped open two of the buttons.

"What..." Her dazed expression detailed the effect of their kiss on her.

"Just improving the view."

The flush that covered her face spread over the generous curves he'd just exposed.

He reached out to the food he'd laid out and picked up a piece of cheese, popping it into her mouth.

She lowered her gaze as she chewed, but with a finger under her chin, he tilted her head up. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing, it's just weird to know you're watching me eat."

Scott frowned in confusion. "Why?"

"Because." She shrugged her shoulders as if that answered everything. It didn't. Not even close.

"Because why?"

Rayne began to sit up, but Scott nudged her back down, refusing to allow her to run away. "Talk to me, baby."

"Because you look like you and I look like me."

"I like the looks of you. A whole lot."

"There's a lot to like." Her derisive tone came through loud and clear.

"Hey now." Scott brushed his thumb over her bottom lip. For the life of him he couldn't believe the words coming out of this sexy mouth. "Don't you know?"

"Know what?"

"Know how utterly beautiful, sexy, and desirable I find you."

“Why?”

“Because you’re you.” It was as simple and as complex as that. “From the first day I met you, you’ve been on mind nonstop.”

“You’ve been in my thoughts as well, daily.”

“I really don’t want to let you out of my sight.”

“I’m glad,” she replied almost shyly.

“And feeding you is for my own pleasure. You bring out the caveman in me. I want to feed you, care for you, take care of you.”

“Drag me home by my hair?” She teased.

“Maybe.” The thought did have some merit. He had never felt such an intense connection with someone before. “But I have some plans for you before dragging you home.”

“Sounds interesting.” She licked her lips, and he groaned remembering those lips wrapped around his cock.

“Damn baby, you make me want to forget my seduction campaign and just move in for the kill.”

“Ah ha, so the big plan was seduction. Tell me more.”

“Good food, good wine, good loving.” As he spoke, he reached down and grasped the bottom of her sundress, slowly pulling it up and exposing her legs to his touch. “And a good time for all.”

“I like this plan.”

“I think you’ll more than like it.” Sitting up, Scott dipped his hand in the basket once more and fumbled around until he felt a satin cloth. With a wicked grin, he pulled out the blindfold and dangled it on his finger. “You’ll love it.”

Rayne’s gaze shot from his to the black material, and then, to his utter and complete pleasure, she smiled. “When you’re right, you’re right.”

Damn. There was no two ways about it. Scott was in love.

I think I'm in love. How she was lucky enough to find a guy who didn't seem to care about her extra pounds was beyond her, but she wasn't one to look a gift horse in the mouth. And when he pulled out the blindfold, she thought she just might orgasm right there on the spot. She'd never been very adventuresome in her sex life, but it wasn't for lack of desire. Rather, the opportunity had never presented itself.

"Are you ready?"

Her nod at his question had him quickly affixing the blindfold over her eyes. The second her eyes were covered, all of her other senses kicked up an extra notch. The forest came audibly alive for her. It was almost as if she heard every chirp of every bird and the wind sifting through the leaves. She could smell the fresh strawberries and the damp grass the blanket lay upon. Rayne felt very alive and a part of nature in a way she hadn't since childhood. The sensation was odd, but pleasant nevertheless.

The blanket rustled under Scott as he moved in closer to her, bringing a smile to her lips. She waited impatiently to see what he had in store for her. Luckily, she didn't have to wait long. Silently, his fingers danced over her skin as he unbuttoned her dress, exposing her ample cleavage and lacy bra. She bit down into her bottom lip to hold back the protest that instinctively came to mind.

Despite her nervousness, despite being out in the open for the world to see, she didn't want to stop. If he undressed her completely and laid her bare on the forest ground, she would allow it. For the first time in a long time, her free-spirited upbringing kicked in. She was as the Lord made her, and there was nothing to be ashamed of.

She heard him grope around in the picnic basket, and she wondered what other surprises he had in store for her. She whooped in surprise at the cool drip of water on the exposed skin of her breasts.

“You look so fucking hot right now.” His fervent words had her own desires racing.

The touch of an ice cube on her hardened nipple, even through the lace of her bra, made her arch in response. While teasing one breast with the ice, he grasped her other nipple, rolling it between his fingers before he alternated his touches. She shifted, restless under the onslaught of his caresses.

Unable to help herself, she reached up blindly and grasped his shoulder, holding him close to her and prolonging the kiss. Finally releasing her lips, he ran his mouth down to the side of her neck, then the hollow of her throat, raining kisses over her heated flesh. As his lips trickled over her, his hand caressed her thighs, edging upward inch by inch.

When his mouth reached her breast, her hands moved from his shoulders to his head, and her fingers entwined in his hair. She began to rotate her hips in earnest as he sucked her breast, teasing the nipple with his tongue. Her moans changed to a cry of delight when he lightly bit her nipple. The fever taking over had her spiraling out of control.

Scott broke away from their embrace, his harsh breathing the only sound she could discern. Apparently, she wasn't the only one holding onto control by a thin thread.

“Come here,” he ordered roughly, helping her sit up. “I want to see all of you.”

Before she realized what was happening, he quickly unbuttoned the dress and pulled it off her body, leaving her clothed in just her lace bra and panties. His soft groan had her smiling. “Like what you see?”

“Hell yes.”

She felt his finger stroke over her rounded stomach and surprisingly didn't feel the need to flinch. Little by little, his touches had her appreciating the beauty of her body.

“But this has to go.” Reaching behind her, he unsnapped her bra and removed it. “And this too. Lift up.” She raised her hips, and he tugged off her panties as well. “Much better. Now lie back and really let me take a look at you.”

She wasn't sure if it was the blindfold shielding her or the champagne she'd drunk, but when she lay down, she didn't shield herself from his gaze. If he wanted to look, who was she to disagree?

"God, you're beautiful," he whispered, and amazingly, for the first time not only did she truly believe him, she felt it.

Beautiful. Cherished. Loved.

Lost in the moment, Rayne slowly stretched her arms above her, taking in everything around her. The cool grass brushed across her upper arms, causing goose bumps to rain over her heated flesh.

"What are you thinking?"

"How soft the grass is." She heard a slight tearing sound seconds before she felt a cool tickling sensation across her nipples. Instinctively, she brought her arms to her side and tried to cover her breasts with her hands, but Scott wasn't having that.

"Uh, uh, uh. Put them back where they were."

"Kay," she said hesitantly.

"Tell me what you feel now." The strange sensation was back, but it didn't feel as ticklish as before.

"The grass?"

"Are you telling me, or asking me?" he asked as he trailed the blades across her breasts.

"Telling."

"And it feels..."

"Odd." But that wasn't all. "Good."

"What about here." He drifted them lower, across her stomach in a zigzag pattern.

"Ticklish." She grinned, trying to stay still.

"And here." He ran the grass down between her open legs, across her damp mound.

It took everything inside her not to close her legs, but still. "Scott..."

"It feels Scott...hmm...how odd."

"It feels naughty."

"We haven't even breeched the walls of naughty...yet."

He moved away from her, and she instantly missed his presence, but she didn't miss the sound of him undressing. The rustling of his clothes dropping on the ground next to her had to have been one of the sexiest things she'd ever heard in her life. "If I can guess what you're doing, do I get a prize?"

"Can I pick the prize?"

"God, yes."

His rich chuckle washed over her skin like a lover's caress. "Guess."

She lifted her head, turning toward his voice. "Baking a cake?"

"That's right. You got it on the first guess." She could feel his hands at her head, and then the blindfold was released. The intensity of the sunlight shocked her for a moment, and she blinked trying to adjust to the brightness. When she was finally able to focus, she could see his face was a mask of lust.

Lust all for me.

"Now for your prize." With a wicked grin, he moved until his head was between her splayed legs and she could feel his warm breath on her inner thighs. Her body quivered with the knowledge of what was to come.

The touch of his tongue on her throbbing sex had her beside herself with desire. She grabbed his head, entwined her fingers in his hair, and pulled him to her with all her might. He alternated licking at her clit and plunging his tongue inside her aching pussy. The dual sensations had her grinding her hips into his mouth and crying out with need. "Oh...mmmm."

Although she wasn't sure, she thought she heard him chuckle, but she felt no embarrassment. Only aching hunger for more. His tongue and lips were driving her to distraction, but it wasn't enough. She needed to be filled.

"Please, fuck me now. I can't take much more of this teasing." She didn't care how the pleading sounded, she needed him inside her.

"If you insist." To her surprise, instead of immediately following through on his comment, he gripped her waist and rolled over, until he was under her. He moved so fast, she had to grip his shoulders to steady herself.

"Whoa."

He grinned wickedly and undulated his hips, causing his cock to brush against her damp folds. "Ride me, baby."

Being somewhat inhibited when it came to her body, she usually didn't like to have sex when she was on top. But with her shyness about her body left behind, she was willing to try something new.

Rayne waited until he sheathed himself for their protection, then positioned herself over his groin. Moving gingerly, she reached between them, took his shaft in hand, and began to lower herself onto him. As the head of his cock touched the wet entrance to her pussy, she spread her legs wider, slowly impaling herself on his erection.

"Yeah baby, that's it." His words of encouragement only inflamed her lust. Biting her bottom lip, she finally seated herself fully, groaning aloud at the full sensation. In this position, he was buried deep within her, deeper than she'd ever thought possible.

"I've never felt so full." It wasn't a complaint, but a wondrous declaration.

Scott's hands tightened on her waist at her words, and she could hear his ragged breathing mingling with her own. She braced her hands on his chest, wondering if she was really going to be able to do this. It all sounded good in theory, but reality was something completely different.

It was better.

“What’s that little Mona Lisa smile about?”

Although she hadn’t realized she’d smiled, she wasn’t surprised. “You’ll see.”

Instead of immediately trying to raise and lower herself, Rayne decided to just go where her mood struck. Rolling her hips, she began to learn the feel of her man and being in control. His answering groan betrayed his appreciation of her efforts.

“Who’s teasing now?”

His hands gripped her hips, bringing a halt to her play.

“Ride me.” His command held no hint of amusement, just frank, harsh need. A need that spoke to her own desires.

“My pleasure.” Closing her eyes, she surrendered to the pleasure threatening to consume her whole. She began rocking on him, learning her rhythm before eventually moving up and down on his cock. The sensations were unimaginable. Fast or slow, deep or shallow, she controlled it all. She reveled in the pure pleasure of the ride.

She could tell he was holding back his own orgasm, allowing her to dictate their loving. And she loved him for it. But she was more than ready.

“I need to come. Help me.”

With her whispered plea, he needed no further urging. Holding her hips firmly, he surged into her, his thrusts in counterpoint to her own. They moved faster and faster, their motions almost a blur. But only when he reached between their bodies and found her clit did she finally explode, gasping and moaning his name as the tidal wave of her climax washed over her.

In the distance she thought she heard him call out her name as well, but the lethargy of their act had caught up to her, and she collapsed to the side. He rolled her completely over and slipped from her weary body. He moved away from her for a few moments, but soon returned to gather her into his arms.

Tired but satisfied, she raised her head up and looked over her shoulder at him. “I have to say...”

“Yes.”

“I really like your place of work.”

“Yeah.” He chuckled softly. “Maybe if we arrange tours like this for all our visitors, we’d get a larger turnout each year.”

“I know I’d recommend you to all my friends.”

“Word of mouth is always a good thing.” He teased, pulling back so she could lie completely on her back. “But just to be sure you give us a stellar review, let me make sure your visit here is a memorable one.”

“If you must.” She grinned up at him, stating no more. “If you must.”

Chapter Six

Forrest rotated his neck, working out the kinks. Free room and board was nice, but his sister's guest bed left much to be desired. The damned thing was a death trap, killing all possibility of a good night's sleep every night. Which was why he was almost happy to wake up at four o'clock this morning to do the baking.

Three hours later he had the case filled for the early morning crowd, he'd prepared the tea, and he was ready and waiting for the bane of his existence to arrive. At precisely six fifty-five, Josie walked in the door, just like clockwork. As soon as she caught a glimpse of his face though, her own brightness dimmed somewhat.

"Oh, hello. No Rayne this morning?"

Forrest smothered his laughter at her attempt to be civil. They had worked together all day Sunday, and needless to say it had been trying for both of them. Despite his abilities, he couldn't deduce why Josie had seemingly taken an instant dislike to him. Thankfully they both had a day off yesterday to escape one another.

Regrettably, his gift wasn't something he could direct to solve the most mundane issues. Instead, it flared up at the most inappropriate times to cause him all kinds of problems. On Sunday he had the unique experience of receiving flashes of a naked Josie on

her knees taking his cock deep in her throat. Regrettably, while his visions broadcasted, she stood nose to nose with him, berating him for flirting with the customers.

“She’ll be in later. She called and asked me to open up this morning.”

“Oh.” Her deflated expression said as much as her one-word response. She was not a happy camper.

The most difficult part to knowing she didn’t like him very much was the fact he knew they’d eventually hook up. It was somewhat anticlimactic, but still, he could use it to fuck with her.

“Come on. It’ll be fun. We can sprinkle sugar over all the muffins.”

He thought he saw a hint of smile before her stony look was back in place. She was going to be a tough one. The problem was, he didn’t see her warming up to him any time soon. In fact, he was pretty sure he had a better chance of hearing “go to hell.”

Ignoring his attempts at teasing, she stowed her backpack beneath the counter and quickly got to work. Together they began waiting on the customers coming in before work to pick up their daily muffin and tea. The next two hours passed in stony silence. Although he made numerous attempts to entice her into conversation, she refused to speak unless she was answering a direct question or had to ask him something.

When things finally slowed down after the morning crowd, Forrest pulled out his tarot cards, for lack of anything better to do, sat down, and began shuffling the deck. He carried the cards with him at all times. He actually didn’t need them to get flashes of the future, but for some reason people freaked out less when they thought the predictions came from the cards.

“Tarot cards?”

He glanced up to see Josie standing above him, arms crossed over her chest.

“My God, she speaks.”

“Don’t you think you’re crossing the line of professionalism here? I don’t think Rayne would appreciate your parlor tricks in her café.”

Forrest smirked at the thought of how little she knew his sister. Obviously, Rayne was able to pass for mainstream better than he realized. “That’s where you’re wrong, sweetheart. But that’s okay. You’ll learn.”

Her eyes flared with indignation. “Don’t call me sweetheart.”

“Okay, baby it is.”

Her head rocked back as if he’d hit her, a dumbfounded expression blanketing her face. “Listen here you --”

Before she could finish her sentence, the bell dinged over the door, signaling the arrival of a new customer. That didn’t stop Forrest, though, from getting in one more shot. “We’ll pick this up later, *baby*.”

Forrest would have sworn he heard her mutter “bastard” under her breath as he glanced behind her to greet the new customers. When he recognized who they were, he grinned. He knew without a doubt if he thought the atmosphere had been chilly before, it was about to turn downright icy when the two women he’d met last week joined him.

“Ladies, welcome back.”

“Hi, Forrest,” they chimed together, clustering around him. “What do you have there?”

“Tarot cards. Would you like to have your cards read?”

“Is that like the occult?” one of them asked hesitantly, much to his amusement. If he had a nickel for every time he’d heard that question, he’d be a mighty rich man.

“No, silly, it’s fortune-telling, right?” The blonde laid her hand on his arm as she spoke and if he wasn’t mistaken actually batted her eyelashes at him. She had flirting down to a science.

“Exactly. Why don’t I go grab you two ladies some tea and snacks, and then we’ll take a glance into your future?”

Forrest stood and returned to the counter only to catch Josie giving him the evil eye. “What’s wrong now?”

“Oooh, Forrest, will you tell us our fortunes?” she asked in an unflattering imitation of the blonde as she pawed at his arm.

“Baby, don’t you think it’s a bit unprofessional to make fun of the customers?”

“I got your baby, all right,” she muttered angrily as he took two muffins from the bakery case. “Don’t forget to charge them for those.”

“I’m all over it,” he said as he poured two cups of the same flavor of tea the women had ordered the other day. And just because he was a bit of an ass and unable to help it, he smacked Josie lightly on the butt as he walked past her. “Feel free to take a break, baby, and come over and watch.”

He winked at her as he grabbed the tray, beyond amused by her stunned expression. Josie was far too stuffy for his peace of mind. He was going to bring her out of her repressed shell if it was the last thing he did.

After handing the women their snacks, he sat back down. “Who wants to go first?”

The timid one afraid of the occult shook her head and pointed to the barracuda. “Nancy, why don’t you go?”

“Only if I hear something good.”

Forrest kept his laughter tamped down. No one went to a fortune-teller to hear bad news. Even when his powers of premonition didn’t give him anything, he was always able to use his intuition to tell the customer what they wanted to hear.

He handed the cards to Nancy. “Think of a question and then shuffle the cards. When you’re ready, hand me the deck.”

She licked her lips in what she probably thought was a seductive maneuver and shuffled the cards. “Will I find the man of my dreams?”

He didn't need any special powers to figure out she was most likely a recent divorcee on the prowl. There was no doubt in his mind with the way she was advertising that she'd soon find someone. Whether it would be the man of her dreams or not, he couldn't say, but he had no problem weaving a good tale.

Using the classic ten-card spread, he dealt the cards and began the reading. Although he didn't get any real premonitions, he told her of hardships in the past and how she had a bright future that included a man in her life. Fortunately, he was able to quickly extract himself from her clutches before she started to ask if he was that man.

Initially, he had planned to stop after the first reading, but with Josie standing behind the counter shooting daggers at him and no other customers in sight, he decided to convince the timid one to have her fortune told as well.

"Are you ready?"

"Oh, I don't know..." She glanced uncertainly around the room.

"Come on, there's no one else here. It'll be fun."

She reluctantly took a seat across from him as Nancy scooted closer to his side. He spent the next ten minutes giving her the reading of a lifetime, even telling her she'd be coming into some money soon. Eventually though, the two women finally took their leave.

The second they departed, Josie unleashed her temper, much to his delight. Watching her stew wasn't nearly as amusing as watch her spew.

"When are you going home?" Her straightforward, no-nonsense question caught him off guard.

He crossed his arms over his chest and leaned against the counter. This was going to be good. "What makes you think I'm not already home?"

"What? I thought you lived in Arizona or something."

"My parents do, but I haven't live with them for years."

"I...just forget it."

"A better question might be why do you want me gone?"

She frowned at him. "That's none of your business."

"I happen to disagree. Especially when you make it my business."

"Fine, you want to know?"

"I wouldn't have asked otherwise."

"You're cramping my style, okay?"

"No, it's not okay. I don't even know what the hell that means. Is that one of those feminine things?"

"No, it isn't." Forrest could practically see the steam pouring out her ears.

"Well you did say cramping --"

"What it means is you're here, everyday, pretending to work and flirting with the desperate housewives."

Pretending to work? Okay, now he wasn't so amused. He might not be a career baker, but he pulled his weight, that was for damned sure. "And what, you want to be the one flirting with the desperate housewives?"

Her eyes flared with anger. "No, damn it. You're deliberately misunderstanding me."

"It's not deliberate, but you're right. I don't understand." And he wasn't sure he wanted to. Forrest never doubted the validity of his premonitions before, but he was beginning to wonder why he would fuck her. She was cute and all, but she was too bitchy by far.

"Fine, I'll use small words. I had a plan and you fucked ...it...up."

He hated to admit it, but he was still confused. Just like every other woman he'd ever met, she expected him to know what the hell she meant. His premonitions were useless when it came to understanding women. "Sorry?"

"Sorry isn't going to get me a partnership in this business. Now that you're here, Rayne won't need me."

“What the hell are you rambling on abo --”

“Looks like I arrived just in time.” Rayne spoke from the doorway, causing them to jump apart guiltily.

She raised her eyebrow at their silence. “Well, is everything okay?”

“Fine.” Josie stared at Forrest as if daring him to dispute her.

“Perfect, no problems here.”

Rayne knew a snow job when she saw one, and this one was a blizzard. She grabbed her brother’s hand and pulled him away from the counter. “Okay, spill it.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about. Besides, I think you have a bigger issue to deal with right now.” He nodded toward the doorway.

Lucy, her face a combination of animation and apprehension, walked into the café and headed straight toward Rayne.

“Luce, what’s going on?” she asked, worried, but trying to keep an even tone in her voice. Her friend never came by at this time of day. Something must really be wrong for her to change her schedule so drastically.

“I did it. I threw him out.” Lucy was shaking so hard Rayne guided her to the nearest sofa.

“Forrest, can you...”

“The pot’s on. I’ll bring the tea as soon as it’s ready.”

“Where are the kids?”

“I sent them to stay with my mom for the rest of the week.”

Something in Lucy’s voice told Rayne there was more to this story than she’d heard so far. “Tell me what happened.”

Lucy glanced up, and then her gaze darted away as Forrest headed in their direction carrying a tray heavily laden with the teapot, cups, and a plate full of goodies.

“Ladies, I’m going to be in the kitchen concocting some creations, and I’m going to need Josie’s assistance. Give us a shout out if you need any help with customers.”

Without waiting for their reply, he set the tray on the table and headed toward the kitchen, dragging a stunned and somewhat irritated Josie along with him.

“I’m so embarrassed, just coming in here and practically collapsing like I did.”

“Please don’t be embarrassed. We’re friends. Now talk.” She poured the tea and watched as Lucy wrapped her hand around the steaming cup before taking a sip.

“God, this tastes good.” Shaking her head as if clearing the cobwebs, Lucy began her story. “After I left here the other day it was as if I suddenly felt courageous. I decided enough was enough and I needed to take my destiny into my own hands.”

She immediately knew what Lucy had done. It was the one thing she’d begged her to do, even if she did nothing else. “You went to Al-Anon.”

Lucy nodded, a small smile dancing over her lips. “I did. And I never realized what a horrible person I was.”

“What?” She was shocked. Al-Anon was supposed to empower people, not degrade them.

“No, no, it was a good thing. I discovered I’ve been enabling Jeff and if I wanted him to change I had to stop.”

“So...”

“He didn’t come home all weekend, but I knew we had to talk as soon as I saw him. I called my mom to take the kids and packed up his stuff. When he walked in the door this morning, I confronted him.”

“Were you scared?”

“Terrified. But I refused to let him see it. I told him he was moving out and, until he could remain clean and sober, he was not allowed to come back.”

“How did he take it?”

Lucy took a sip of her hot tea before she answered. “Not well. Oh, he was civil enough. Jeff isn’t the type to hit a woman. Thankfully, he’s not a mean drunk. He’s a master when it comes to laying on the guilt trip though. I don’t know how I did it, but I stood strong. It was as if I had this wall behind me, supporting me the entire time.”

“I have to ask. What suddenly gave you all this courage?”

“That’s just it. I have no idea. Before now I was this bundle of nerves, totally timid and unable to make a decision to stand up to him to save my life. After our visit though, I felt filled with confidence. Maybe your carob brownie helped me grow a backbone.”

She laughed at the thought, but Lucy’s words stayed with her. The two women talked for a little while longer, but eventually the real world intruded and the café began to get busy once more. After two or three interruptions, they made plans to meet later in the week. Forrest and Josie returned from the kitchen to help with the crowd.

Rayne took a small break once the rush died down to enjoy a delicious treat her brother had baked up. But despite the gooey goodness of the honey muffin, she still couldn’t get Lucy’s words out of her mind.

“Hey, Sis, why so pensive?”

For a million different reasons she wished she could just shrug her shoulders and say nothing, but knowing Forrest as she did, she knew he would never believe her or let the matter rest. “Lucy said something earlier, and for some reason I haven’t been able to get it out of my head.”

“What did she say, if I can ask?”

“Just something about how my brownie gave her courage.”

Instead of laughing at her statement, Forrest's eyes widened in reaction. And somehow she'd been expecting that response. Because the situation had been niggling at her brain, she just knew it meant something.

"Oh God, what is it?"

"Don't freak out."

"When you say don't freak out, don't you think I'm going to do just that?"

He sighed heavily. "I should have realized this was why I was meant to come here."

"Okay, you're really starting to piss me off now. Do you think you could stop with the riddles and tell me what the hell you're talking about?"

"Sorry, come on, sit down and I'll try to explain."

Tentatively she joined him on the couch, wondering why she used to think the furniture was warm and comforting.

"Mom's been worried about you. When I told her I thought you might need me, she begged me to look for a sign your powers might have come to fruition and you just didn't realize it."

Her brother's announcement had stunned her. "When were you going to mention this little tidbit to me?"

Forrest grimaced. "Umm, never?"

"Why would Mom think I had come into my talent and not know about it?"

"She's been doing some research. It seems our great-great-grandmother received her powers later in life, and Mom suspects you might have the same talent."

"Just spit it out."

"She thinks you have ability to influence people, and I think you're doing it with your food."

Rayne blinked for a moment, trying to process what he just said. “Why would you think that?”

“Today two little boys came in looking for you. They told me your special goodies helped them pass their spelling test. And Lucy thinks your brownies gave her courage. I think you see a need and are subconsciously infusing your treats with your power to influence them.”

The bell above the door jingled, announcing a new arrival. Scott walked in and headed straight toward her. He grabbed her hand, pulling her into his arms for a searing kiss. “God, I’ve missed you.”

“Come on, it’s only been an hour.”

“It feels like forever. I don’t want you out of my sight.”

A sudden chill swept over her, and she glanced at her brother with a stricken thought. All summer she’d been feeding Scott muffins and hoping he’d ask her out. What if subconsciously she’d been mixing her powers in along with the oat bran and Scott had been affected by her? She’d been a bit surprised a hottie like him was interested in plus-sized her. Now she had to wonder if his interest was genuine or a result of her paranormal gifts.

Chapter Seven

It had been almost a week since Scott had seen Rayne, and he was no longer willing to accept her excuses. If he didn't know any better, he'd think she was avoiding his every attempt to see her. It seemed like every time he called she was occupied with something or someone else. And when he wanted to get together earlier in the week, she'd put him off more than once with a flimsy excuse. Fortunately, the café was closed on Mondays, and he was ready to take her out for a day of fun.

In a hurry to see her again, he took the stairs to her apartment two at a time. He was missing the taste of her sweet mouth and the feel of her body under his. But it wasn't only sex. He missed Rayne, the funny, happy-go-lucky woman he'd been falling in love with. This week he'd only seen the side of her that was harried and too busy to talk.

He was shocked by the sight of Rayne when she answered his knock. She looked as if she'd just gotten over the flu. Her bloodshot eyes and red nose made it almost seem as if she'd been crying.

"Hey gorgeous, is everything okay?"

A pained expression passed over her face so quickly he almost missed it. "I'm not gorgeous. I look like death warmed over."

“Umm, okay, true, but I was trying to be polite.”

She sighed with resignation. “I know, I’m sorry. This week has just been...”

“I know you’ve been busy. And that’s why I’m here. I thought I could take you out for your day off.”

A sad little smile graced her lips. “That’s sweet, really. But I don’t think I’m up for going out. I just want to veg.”

“Where’s your brother?”

“I kind of threw him out for the day. Living and working together, we’ve started to get on each other’s nerves a bit.”

“Perfect. You go take a shower, and we’ll order pizza and watch movies all day.”

She looked torn, but eventually relented. “Okay, but no meat on my half, please.”

“Deal.”

She nodded and headed toward the bathroom while he picked up the phone and called for the pizza. Finishing that task took less than three minutes, leaving him nothing to do but listen to the shower in the background. He could imagine her standing there nude, soaping the luscious curves of her body, and instantly he began to harden. Almost without thought he found himself heading in the direction of the running water. The shower drew him like a moth to the flame.

I’ll just tell her the pizza’s been ordered.

Despite knowing how lame that sounded, it was the only plan he had. Feeling all kinds of stupid, he made his way to her bathroom. The room was filled with steam from the hot shower. He quickly stripped out of his clothes and pulled back the curtain.

Rayne stood under the showerhead, water streaming over her nude body. Her arms were raised above her head, rinsing her hair. He thought she looked like a goddess.

“Pizza’s ordered.”

She jerked at his voice, and he grabbed her arm to steady her.

“What are you doing here?”

She seemed shocked by his presence in her shower, not at all like the uninhibited woman he'd gotten to know. Her eyes were wide, and she was looking everywhere but at him.

“I thought I'd come scrub your back.” He pulled her into his embrace, wrapping his arms around her. She stood stiffly at first, her arms hanging loosely by her sides. He had no idea why she was acting this way, but he had the feeling she wasn't in the mood to explain either. Instead he was going to have to loosen her up first.

His hands stroked her back, gently soothing her rigid muscles until he finally felt her body begin to relax. “I've missed you.”

She wrapped her arms around his waist and laid her head on his chest. “I've missed you too.”

The weight he'd been carrying suddenly lifted. She'd been acting so distant and different he'd been worried perhaps he'd pushed things too far too quickly. But now that she was here, back in his arms, all seemed right with the world once again.

“It looks like you missed a bit here.” He ran his hand over the top of her head, enjoying the feel of her slicked hair beneath his finger. “Why don't I help you?”

Together they stepped back toward the showerhead, and as the water streamed down he massaged her scalp, rinsing the soap from her hair. He could feel her relaxing under his gentle ministrations.

“God, it feels so good.” She stared up into his face, a seductive smile dancing over her lips. “But now it's time I took care of you.”

She turned the nozzle away before pushing him back a step and dropping to her knees in front of him. Her gaze was raised to his, and she stared deeply into his eyes before grasping his cock and leaning forward to lick at the tip of it.

All sensation was centered on his cock. He didn't feel the tile wall behind him, the ceramic tub beneath his feet, or even the cool air caressing his body. Only Rayne, and her mouth, licking at him. His hips jerked as her wicked tongue traced the vein running the length of his cock.

"Yeah baby, suck me, take me in your mouth."

He saw a sexy little smile just before she engulfed him. The hot wet cavern of her mouth was heaven on Earth. He wanted to take her head in his hands and fuck himself into her mouth. But this was her show and he wasn't going to take over. At least not yet.

He watched her cheeks hollow as she sucked him and groaned at the sensations she was evoking. It was almost impossible for him to keep a rein on his desires. When she hummed her delight, the vibrations danced over the length of his cock, sending him into a tailspin of pleasure.

"Take it baby, take all of me." His control, held by a tenuous thread, broke. "That's it. Swallow me down." Reaching out, he twined her hair in his hands and fucked her mouth for all he was worth. He'd been too long without her to be gentle and kind, but from the way she swallowed him, she was more than fine with it.

His orgasm snuck up on him, robbing him blind of his strength, his willpower, and his seed. With a heady shout, he came, moaning her name as he filled her mouth with his essence.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck." Groaning, he released her hair and stepped back.

He felt drained, literally and figuratively. Rayne sat back on her heels, her hands on her thighs, just staring up at him. "Damn baby, you are phenomenal."

"That's only the beginning." She held out her hand to him, and he pulled her up. "Tonight is going to be...extra special."

He wasn't sure why her words gave him a moment's pause, but the look on her face told him all he needed to know. She wanted him, and their time in the shower had only whetted his appetite for more.

It was his other appetite that was going to be satisfied first however. The doorbell rang, announcing the arrival of the pizza he'd ordered.

"Damn, let me go get that. Stay right here." He hopped out of the shower and wrapped a towel around his waist. Snagging his wallet from his pants pocket, he headed toward the door and paid for the pizza.

He planned to put the pizza in the refrigerator and return immediately to Rayne. When he went into the kitchen, however, she was already there, wrapped in a thick terry cloth robe and pulling out plates and napkins.

"I thought I told you to stay in the bathroom."

"I don't do the order thing too well."

"It didn't seem that way when I had you in my bed last weekend."

"Oh well, in bed is an entirely different story."

"Got it. I'll just keep you in bed and I'll be able to have my wicked way with you."

"You can have your wicked way with me anytime. Just feed me first."

"Your wish is my command." He whipped open the top of the pizza box with a dramatic flare, and she laughed at his comedic attempts, just as he hoped she would.

Sitting at her kitchen table, they ate their pizza, and he asked about her week. Although she talked about the business, it didn't seem as if this week was any more special than any other. He didn't want to push, but he continued to feel as if there was something she just wasn't telling him.

"Scott, can I tell you something?"

"Of course."

“I know I said I just wanted to veg out today and you suggested movies, but that’s not really what I want to do.”

“Okay, then what?”

“Take me to bed, please. Love me like there’s no tomorrow.”

“My pleasure.”

Rayne thanked her lucky stars when Scott didn’t question her about her sudden request. This would be the last time she would allow herself to be with him, so she wanted to make it special. She couldn’t in all good conscience continue a relationship with him, when it wasn’t of his own free will.

She’d been avoiding him all week, hoping to figure out how to fix the problem she’d created, and the only solution she could come up with was one she didn’t want to face. She was going to have to break up with him and hope the distance would break her power over him.

But when he’d shown up at her apartment, she realized she was selfish. She wanted him one last time. It would be something she could remember him by.

Standing up, she grabbed his hands and pulled him from his chair. “Come on. I don’t want to waste another minute.”

“Neither do I.”

Scott quickly turned the tables on her, pushing her back against the kitchen wall, his body pressing tightly against hers. She could feel the outline of his cock beneath his towel and wanted to reach out to touch him. But he had captured her wrists and held them shackled to the wall.

He bent his head, his lips capturing hers, demanding in their urgency. She met his challenge head on, giving as good as she got. This is what she wanted, him hungry for her.

Attempting to up the ante, she squirmed in his embrace, her hips pushing forward to tease his growing erection.

Breaking their kiss, he lay his head against hers, breathing deeply. "What are you doing to me?"

His question broke her heart, but she wasn't willing to face the fire just yet. "Loving you, just loving you."

He stepped back, releasing her wrists and smiling at her wickedly. "Not yet, but you will be."

"You've got to catch me first." She turned and ran from the kitchen, heading to the bedroom. Only two steps into the hallway, however, her sprint was halted when she was picked up and thrown over his shoulder. "Oh my God, put me down."

"No way. You pulled the tiger's tail."

"And you're the tiger?"

"Which makes you my prey."

He stalked down the hallway to her bedroom, unerringly finding his way without question. She didn't know if it was instinct or the fact it was the only open door in the hallway, but she soon found herself being tossed from his shoulder and onto the bed.

"You know, when I teased you about going all caveman on me, I didn't think you'd really do it."

"I guess I have a few hidden secrets from you then, because I've wanted to go caveman on you since you agreed to go out with me."

Rayne pushed away the sense of dread his comment produced and tried to concentrate on the right here and now.

"Now that you've got me in your cave, what are your plans for me?"

"Well technically, it's your cave. But as for my plans" -- he rubbed his hands together and chuckled -- "let's start with getting you naked."

He reached out and snagged the tie of her robe, pulled it free of the loops, and tossed it on the floor. Then, joining her on the bed, he parted the lapels and pushed the robe off her shoulders, baring her to his hungry gaze.

“You take my breath away.”

She tried not to let it affect her, but it was hard not to feel pleasure at his compliments. The lust in his eyes was all for her, and she wanted it all. She grasped his shoulders and pulled him down to her. “It’s time for you to live up to your promise and make love to me.”

He smiled and bent his head to capture her mouth. Their lips met and his hand tangled in her hair as he angled her head to delve deeper into her mouth. She gave into the passion of his searing kiss, allowing him to press her back against the mattress. Her legs shifted restlessly beneath his, desperate for him to fill her. Instead of ripping his towel off and plunging deep inside her, as she would have loved, he lay down beside her, continuing to drive her to madness with his kiss.

It wasn’t enough. Frustrated, she tore her mouth from his and pleaded her case. “Please Scott, I need you.”

“How much?”

Was he kidding? Her body yearned for his touch, her pussy for his cock. “Very, very much.”

“Enough to give yourself to me?” He feathered his fingers down her breast, past her stomach to the waiting oasis shamelessly weeping between her legs. But to her utter surprise, he didn’t stop there, he wandered farther and touched her in a place no man had ever caressed her before. “All of you?”

If tonight was truly their last night together, Rayne didn’t want to walk away from any experience Scott had to offer. For now, she was his. All of her. And he could have her any way he desired. “Yes. All of me.”

His touch tantalized as he fingered her wet pussy and used the moisture there to tease at her rosette. Slowly he pressed one finger into her ass. At first it was an odd sensation, but she began to adapt to his gentle probing.

“Have you ever done this before?”

She shook her head. “No, never.”

“We’ll take it slow.”

Before she could comment, he rotated his finger and tenderly began to add a second digit. She gasped at the fullness in her rear, and he immediately stopped all movement.

“Are you okay?”

“I don’t know, just give me a minute.” If she couldn’t even handle two fingers, how was she going to be able to take his huge cock? She breathed heavily, trying to relax.

Ever so delicately, he removed his fingers. “We’re going to need lube. Lots and lots of lube.”

“Bedside table.”

Thankfully, she had something on hand. Generously coating his fingers, he easily slid one back inside her and then after a few deft strokes he added the second. This time, the pain was barely noticeable. The feeling of fullness was still there, but it was so much better.

“Better?”

“Getting there.”

“I bet I can help it along the way.” He slid his fingers out to coat them again, but this time when he pressed them back against her slick back door, he lowered his mouth to her pussy as well.

As he teased and tantalized her with this tongue, he fucked her ass with his fingers, going deeper with every downward stroke. Soon two fingers became three, moving rapidly in her virgin entrance, yet he never let up on his oral overtures. Overwhelmed, Rayne could do nothing but moan and writhe under his erotic assault.

It was too much and not enough, all at the same time. “Ple-please, Scott. Fuck me. Fuck me now. I’m ready.”

Still he persisted until she came, pumping down on his fingers and screaming his name. Only when she began the descent from her release did he pull his fingers from her ass. “*Now* you’re ready.”

Was she ever. Rayne watched through bliss-filled eyes as Scott rolled a condom over his cock and squirted several large drops of lube onto the latex. He stroked his cock, much like she imagined he did when he was alone, until it glistened all over.

When it looked as if he was ready to begin, she tried to roll over onto her stomach, but to her surprise he stopped her in midmotion. “No, I want to watch you.”

Parting her legs, he pushed them wide. Although she felt vulnerable, she reminded herself this was what she’d asked for, what she wanted. She knew if she suddenly called a halt, he would be disappointed but would do as she asked.

He took his cock in hand and positioned it against her rosette, and bit by bit pressed forward. The tension on his face was visible. He was going slowly for her and she loved him for it. But she wanted him as uncontrolled as she felt.

Taking her breasts in her hands, she started to flick at her nipples, teasing herself as well as him.

“Mmmmm, incredible.” His muttered praise was music to her ears. But his actions were even better. Leaning down, he captured a taut nipple and sucked it into his mouth. She gasped and arched her back into his caress.

He pulled back until just the head of his cock was still buried inside her before pressing forward once again. Beginning a rhythm, he fucked her ass with measured strokes. Slowly but surely she began to push back against him, returning his thrusts with those of her own.

“You are so fucking hot and tight.” His words came out in a gasp and spurred her own desires. She pulled at her nipples, enjoying the sharp pain, but it wasn’t enough. Sliding her hand over her rounded stomach, she reached between her legs to furiously rub her clit.

He glanced down at her movements, and his eyes widened with delight. “So fucking sexy.” Scott’s jaw was clenched tightly as he spoke.

His thrusts began to speed up in time to her frantic frigging. She was pushing her hips up to meet his every downward stroke as she strived for her orgasm. His hands gripped her hips tightly as he pistoned into her ass with a ferocity she had never experienced.

“I’m not going to last much longer.”

She was right there with him. “Me either.”

“Then take me, all of me.” He was practically pushing her body across the bed with his movements.

“Yes, yes, yes!” she screamed as her orgasm rippled through her with the force of a tidal wave.

Scott held onto her hips and thrust once, then twice more before he joined her with his own grunts of ecstatic release. Slowly and carefully, he pulled from her ass and lowered her legs to the bed. “That was so good, baby; I think I’ve died and gone to heaven.”

She’d been completely wanton and loved every minute of it. Her orgasm had been harder than any she’d ever experienced, and her body was still pulsing in aftershock. “More than good, it was great.”

His shout of laughter had her frowning for a moment. “Don’t you remember Tony the Tiger?”

She smiled ruefully. As he retreated to the bathroom, she turned to watch him walk, enjoying the view. He returned a few moments later with a warm cloth in hand. She moaned her appreciation of his gentle touch. She felt weak and utterly drained. Closing her eyes, she listened as he slipped back into the bathroom and disposed of the cloth.

A few minutes later he returned to the bed and gathered her into his arms. She let herself sink into the embrace, forgetting for a moment the situation she was in. Her quiet reflection was shattered all too soon.

“I love you,” he whispered into her ear before falling asleep.

She, on the other hand, was still wide awake. Worried about how she would be able to make the final break, she slipped from his arms. Sitting up, she snagged the afghan, wrapped it around her, and left the room.

Chapter Eight

Scott slowly came awake and observed his surroundings. Earlier he'd been a little too preoccupied to appreciate Rayne's bedroom, only caring about the large bed in the middle of it. Her sense of style permeated here just as it did everywhere else in her apartment. The walls were a taupe that anywhere else might look plain. But with all the multicolored accessories, it was perfect. He turned to tell her how much he liked the decorating, but she wasn't lying next to him in the bed.

He sat up, rubbing his hands over his face. It was unlike him to fall asleep in the middle of the day, but he'd had a strenuous workout. Just thinking about it made his cock start to awaken as well. Remembering the way she had offered herself to him made him once again thank his lucky stars she was in his life.

A noise from outside the room had him standing to go and find her. Maybe he could talk her into returning to the bed for some more afternoon delight. He walked into the living room to discover Rayne curled up on the couch, a colorful afghan wrapped around her nude body. Although she wasn't crying, her face betrayed something wasn't right.

"Hey baby, everything okay?" As he asked the question he prayed their loving hadn't gone too far. He was a demanding lover and he wondered if she was now having regrets.

"I'm sorry, Scott, but I don't think this is going to work out. You need to leave."

Stunned, he stood as if frozen. He didn't know what the hell was going on here, but if she thought he would blithely leave with that lame-ass excuse, she had another think coming. If she was feeling vulnerable and upset because of what had happened earlier, they would deal with it together.

"Sorry, sweetie. I know you've probably have been out here working out this little speech, and maybe it sounded great in your head, but it's not going to fly. Talk to me. What's going on?"

"Nothing's going on. I just think it's best you leave."

"Best for whom?"

"You." She probably didn't even realize it, but she was crumbling the edges of the afghan in her hands and glancing away from him every time she spoke.

He tentatively sat down on the couch. Scott knew something was very wrong here, and he didn't want to upset her and make it worse, but he wasn't leaving. "I think I can decide what's best for me. And that's to hear the truth."

She crossed her arms. "Are you calling me a liar?"

"Yep. And you can drop the outrage. We both know there is something else going on here."

He reached out and tugged at her hand. She put up a cursory resistance at first, but eventually let him pull her into his arms.

"You don't understand." Her words were muffled against his chest, but he still heard them. "We can't keep doing this."

"Rayne, baby, if I pushed too much too soon we can take things slow. There's no need to be so dramatic."

She pulled back from him, confusion rampant across her face. "What are you talking about?"

"I was just saying if the anal sex was too much..." She frowned and waved her hand, stopping his words cold.

Completely off base.

She smiled sadly and laid her hand on his arm. "No, I wanted to and I thoroughly enjoyed it."

Her words were as sincere as the blush staining her cheeks. But if she wasn't upset by that, he had no idea what was bothering her.

"Talk to me, damn it."

She flinched at the tone of his voice, paling even more, if that were possible. "It's not that simple."

"Of course it is." He knew his frustration was scaring her, but he didn't know how to break through and make her open up to him. "You can tell me anything, Rayne. I love you."

Upset, she rose and wrapped the afghan around her like a shield. "Don't say that."

Confused, he rose as well. "Don't say what? I love you?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because you don't."

He stepped back, momentarily rebuffed. Scott had experienced many things in his life, but this was a first. A woman who didn't want her boyfriend to love her. "I'll thank you not to tell me how I feel. I know we haven't known each other long in the romantic sense, but I know my own mind."

"No, you don't," she insisted, much to his ire.

"I do."

"Trust me. You don't."

"You're not making any sense."

“You want sense?”

He crossed his arms over his chest in annoyance. “That would be nice.”

“How about honesty?”

“Feel free.”

“Fine. What you feel for me isn’t love. It’s a hypnosis...of sorts.”

He stared at her, baffled. Was he dreaming? Was this a weird, unfunny joke? If so, he wasn’t laughing. “Okay, now you’re really not making any sense.”

“It’s hard to explain.”

“Use small words.”

“There’s something about my family I never told you.”

“Like their tendency to have psychotic episodes?” he wondered aloud.

“No.” She waved his words away. “We’re all perfectly sane. Well, all except for my father’s Aunt Lulu. But that’s not the point.”

“You’re right about that. Enough of the veiled pseudo-speak. Just spit it out, whatever you’ve been hiding all week.”

Her eyes widened in shock and he knew he’d been right. Whatever this paranormal bullshit was, it was what had kept her from him all week. And he was more than ready for some straight answers.

Her shoulders drooped and her strong facade fell away. Returning to sit on the couch, she waved her hand listlessly. “I know you most likely won’t believe me, but this is the truth.”

Joining her on the couch, he sat silently and waited for her to continue.

“My family isn’t like normal families, and I’m not just talking about the fact we grew up on a commune.”

What the hell? “You grew up on a commune?”

“Yes.” She huffed in frustration at his interruption. “My family has paranormal abilities.”

He stared at her in disbelief. The sad fact of the matter was he knew she believed this crock of shit. He could clearly see it on her face. And he had the feeling this was only the tip of the iceberg she had in store for him.

“We? Meaning you as well.”

She sighed heavily and nodded. “My powers never manifested. I thought I took after my dad’s side of the family or something. But that wasn’t the case. I’m just a late bloomer.”

“What are these powers of yours exactly?”

“Forrest calls it the power of persuasion.”

Forrest. Her damned brother had somehow convinced her of this crap, he just knew it. He knew that asshole didn’t like him.

“So let me get this straight. Until your brother came to visit, you didn’t have any special talents, but now you do?”

“Yes, no, I mean...you’re confusing me.”

“I’m glad I’m not the only one.”

“Please, Scott. This isn’t a joke. Just listen, please.” She laid her hand on his arm pleadingly.

He decided if he wanted to hear the whole story he was going to have to stop challenging her every word. “Go ahead.”

“I realize you don’t believe in this and I understand. But paranormal abilities do exist, whether you chose to accept it or not. I’ve been around them my whole life.”

“Help me understand.”

“My mom has the power of healing. She can channel her energy into someone, and it speeds up the healing process.”

“Her energy?” He knew he was crazy for even entertaining her delusion, but he couldn’t stop himself from asking questions.

“I don’t know how to explain it. But Forrest can tell the future, and my other brother, Phoenix, talks to ghosts. My sister Star can touch an object and know all kinds of things about it, and my other sister, Harmony, can sense thoughts and feelings.”

“So tell me about your power of persuasion and how it hypnotized me.”

“That’s just it; I really don’t know how it works. Powers manifest in different ways. I think I’ve been infusing my energy into my baking and compelling those around me to do what I want.”

He decided to ignore for a minute the complete improbability of what she’d just revealed. Instead, he focused on the one point he was much more interested in. “And you wanted me to fall in love with you?”

“Yes.” Her voice sounded so miserable he almost felt bad he was going to prove her wrong. Almost.

“As glad as I am to hear you wanted me to fall in love with you, it had nothing to do with your muffins.”

“You don’t understand. I made you a muffin every day, all summer, just hoping you’d ask me out.”

“I know, baby. And I appreciate your thoughtfulness. But I haven’t had one of your muffins since the first day.”

Wow. Out of every response Rayne imagined, that wasn’t even remotely a blip on the radar. She was so startled by his comment it took her a few seconds to respond, and when she did, the words came out jumbled and high pitched.

“Whatdoyoumean?” Closing her eyes, she took a deep breath before reopening them and trying again. “I’ve given you a muffin every single day.”

“True. But I’m not much of a fan of oat bran. I just didn’t want to hurt your feelings. Besides, it was a good excuse to come by every day.”

Confusion assailed her. She didn’t know what to think. “What have you been doing with them?”

“Shamus loves them. I usually feed them to him as a treat on the walk back home.”

“You’ve been giving my muffins to the dog?” She knew she sounded unreasonable, but she’d made those muffins for him.

“You should see your face right now.” He shook his head in disbelief. “Instead of worrying about the dog, you should be listening to what I’m saying. I wanted to come back in every day to see you. Not for your paranormal muffins, or even for regular oat bran muffins. I came back for one reason and one reason only.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you.”

She sighed heavily. “Don’t you see? That just proves my point. There must be something extraordinary at work.”

“Why?”

“Because under any normal circumstances, a guy like you wouldn’t be interested in someone like me.”

His brow furrowed in confusion. “Do you want to explain that one to me?”

“I think it’s pretty obvious. I’m an overweight health food store owner that you admittedly think is somewhat kooky, and you’re, well, you.” She waved her hand at his hard-toned body.

“I don’t believe this. Is this some veiled reference to your weight again? Because that is total bullshit. You are beautiful just the way you are. To be honest, I’m getting pretty damned tired of you bringing it up every five minutes.”

He was tired of her bringing it up? Well, she was tired of feeling that way. Seemed to her they were both in a precarious situation.

"I'm trying to be realistic here. I can't take the chance you're not operating under your own free will." It wasn't fair to him and it wasn't fair to her. Why couldn't he see that?

Scott stood and looked down at her, his expression resentful and somewhat mocking. "Pardon my language, Rayne, but this is the stupidest thing I've ever heard." When she began to interject, he held up his hand to stop her words. "Not the part where you believe you're in touch with the dark forces."

"It's not dark magic," she murmured.

"I could live with that, if that were the case. I'm pretty damned open-minded. I could adjust. Hell, Samantha was hot when she wiggled her nose and all. But what I can't deal with is the fact you can't even fathom the possibility that I love you. For you, it has to be some sort of voodoo you do to make me care about you, and that, my dear, is the part I just can't accept."

"You have to understand --"

"No, I don't. Ask yourself this, Rayne. If I was under your muffin mojo, would I be the slightest bit upset at your declaration or too far gone to care?"

As he turned and headed down the hallway, she buried her face in her hands. Rayne felt as if her heart was breaking. She anticipated this would be hard, but never imagined it would ever get this bad. It would be so easy to throw caution to the wind and just fall into his arms, but how could she be so irresponsible?

She looked up as he walked back into the living room fully dressed, his face still thunderous. "You let me know if you ever come up with an antidote, so I can take it and prove to you my feelings are real."

The door slammed behind him as he stormed out the apartment, leaving Rayne behind.

* * * * *

When Forrest returned a few hours later, Rayne was dressed, but not much else had changed from the time Scott had left. She still sat at one end of the couch, afghan wrapped around her as if it could ward off the chill that had settled around her heart. Dusk was imminent and the room was bathed in shadows, but she didn't attempt to turn on any lights. The atmosphere suited her mood just fine.

"Rayne, what are you doing sitting in the dark?" Her brother flipped on the lamp, totally ruining her retreat into murkiness.

"Dying inside." The words popped out before she could censor them. She didn't want anyone to feel sorry for her.

Instead of replying, he sat in the chair and reached out his hand to take hers. Together they sat in silence for a few minutes, and she drew strength from the loving support he was giving.

"Want to talk about it?"

"I told him to leave." Even saying the words made her heart ache all over again.

He stared at her, baffled. "Why? I thought things were going well between you two."

Was he serious? She dropped his hand and twisted around on the couch to stare at him. "Because I don't want to date a guy who is only with me because my powers made him love me."

"Your powers can't do that."

For the second time today she heard something completely out of left field, and once again it struck her silent for a moment. "Wait a minute. You're the one who told me I had the power to persuade people to do what I wanted."

Forrest shook his head in disbelief. "Do you really think love is so easily manipulated?"

Apparently she did. "What else was I supposed to think?"

“You’re smarter than this, Rainbow baby. The power to persuade is like hypnosis. You can’t make someone do something they weren’t open to doing anyway. The most you’re doing is pushing up the timetable. Even so, love is more powerful.”

She stood and started pacing, anguish racing through her. Had she made a mistake?

“We’ve been going out less than two weeks and he’s already declaring his love for me. That’s just crazy.”

“Are you listening to yourself? First, you’ve known each other months, not weeks, even if you’ve only been dating for a short time. Second, you love him, so why is it so hard for you to believe he can love you?”

“But why would he want someone like me?” When it came down to it, that was the one variable she couldn’t compute.

Instead of the sympathy she expected, Forrest fired back with anger. “Seeing you right now, I’m wondering the same damn thing myself. You’re beautiful, intelligent, loving, and kind. Hell, I don’t know why anyone would want to be with someone like you.”

She flushed miserably at his mocking words. His sarcasm was palpable and truly unwanted. Rayne already felt horrible. She didn’t need him to add anything to the mix. Scott had said almost the same thing and she’d refused to believe him. Sinking back onto the couch, she pressed her hands against her cheeks in embarrassment. “Oh God, what am I going to do?”

“I can’t tell you what to do. But you better be prepared to grovel. Because as a man, I know I wouldn’t appreciate the woman I was in love with not trusting me.”

“It’s not that I didn’t trust him...”

“Yes, that’s exactly what it was. You didn’t trust him to know his own feelings for you. You didn’t trust his love was stronger than any paranormal power you might have over him.”

If she thought she felt bad before, she felt ten times worse now. At least then she thought she was doing what was right. She was being the bigger person, sacrificing her love for his freedom. Her benevolence now seemed selfish in retrospect.

“Would you forgive me?”

“You’re my sister. It’s not the same circumstances.” Forrest joined her on the couch and wrapped his arms over her shoulders. “Go see him and talk to him. It’s the only way.”

It might be the only way, but Rayne knew it wasn’t going to be that simple. She just had to hope it wasn’t too late.

Chapter Nine

Scott sat on his patio, staring up at the starlit sky. Of all the ways he imagined ending the day, breaking up with Rayne wasn't one of them. How the day could have started so well and ended so badly he had no idea. Not only was he in love with a woman who didn't believe his declaration, she might very well be suffering from a mental illness.

He took a swig of tequila, emptying his glass. For a moment he contemplated getting himself another drink, but he was just too damned lazy to stand up. Emotional exhaustion could be just as taxing as the physical kind. The Fates were laughing at him as the doorbell began to ring. He glanced at his watch and wondered who would be stopping by at this late hour.

Cursing under his breath, he rose up angrily from his chair. He was in no mood for visitors. But neither was he in the mood to listen to the damn bell ring all night. After storming into the house, he yanked the door open and stared in surprise at the source of his sore mood.

"Rayne, what are you doing here?"

"I came to see you."

“Why? Did you bring more of your mojo muffins?” He was in a mean mood and it showed. “I could use a snack.”

In contradiction to his sarcastic and unkind words, he devoured her with his gaze. Rayne looked almost as bad as he felt. Her hair was pushed back with a headband, and her face was scrubbed clean of any makeup, but she looked as if she’d spent the day crying. He wanted to take her in his arms and comfort her, but was unsure of his reception.

She pressed her lips together before taking a deep breath and speaking. “Can I come in? I’d like to talk.”

Scott was tempted to say no, but figured he could be just as miserable with her company as he was without. Stepping back, he waved her into his home. He’d like to be able to tell her he wasn’t interested in anything she had to say, but it would be a lie.

From out of nowhere, Shamus bounded into the room and headed straight for her. Scott shook his head, bemused at his mutt’s behavior. At least someone was happy to see her. As Rayne bent to lovingly pat the animal, Scott thought back to his previous relationships. None of the other women ever got a nudge from his standoffish dog, let alone the full face licking Rayne was currently receiving. It made him wonder if her muffins really might have some secret powers.

Irritated at his train of thought, he snagged the dog’s collar. “Here, let me put him outside.”

“Oh...okay.”

Tugging as hard as he could, he herded a whining, disgruntled Shamus out onto the patio and shut the door, much to the barking dog’s dismay. When he turned back around, Rayne was standing behind him. Despite how irked he was with her, she was far too hard to resist. To avoid temptation, he crossed his arms over his chest. “So talk.”

Her pained expression more than anything told him what a hard-ass he was being. But, until he knew what she had to say, he wasn’t willing to put his heart back out only to have it

trampled once again. At least that's what he was telling himself. Realistically, he knew there was something special about Rayne he wasn't willing to let go of just yet.

She began to pace, and he could practically see the wheels turning in her head as she figured out exactly what she wanted to say. "I think I might have made a very big mistake, probably the biggest in my life."

Saying "I told you so" wasn't the best move right now, but he couldn't keep totally silent on the subject. "So is it you think, or you know?"

She collapsed onto the couch. "I know I made a mistake with you. Forrest pointed out what an idiot I was for not trusting in your love, and he was right. Maybe I was running scared from it and you as well."

Since it sounded like her brother had talked some sense into her, Forrest was back on the good guy list. Scott was more interested in her other comments, however. He joined her on the couch, still not touching, but close enough.

"Why are you scared, baby?"

"God, this is so complicated. I've never been truly in love before, and I think the intensity of it was a bit overwhelming. And I know you said you hated this, but it was hard to believe you would love me for me. It was easier to think it had to do with something extraordinary."

"Come here."

"No."

"No?" Okay, he hadn't been expecting that. "Why not?"

"Because if I do, we'll end up in bed and this won't have been resolved. I want to tell you about me. Everything."

As much as he wanted to hold her right now, he would respect her need to talk without distraction. And she was probably right; they wouldn't get much talking done once he touched her.

Scott nodded his head. "I want to know everything about you, so tell me." He listened attentively as she told him about her family.

"My family has always been a bit different, and not just because of our paranormal powers."

"Different how?"

"I know you were surprised to hear I grew up on a commune."

He chuckled ruefully. "It was a bit of a shock."

"My life was unconventional to say the least. At the commune we were away from society and its norms. As little kids we ran around naked. We were homeschooled. And my family's powers seemed normal. In fact, I was the oddball who never had anything special to distinguish me."

He wiggled his eyebrows suggestively. "I wouldn't say that."

"Well, the things you appreciate aren't exactly on the same list as those I'd brag about to my family. Except my cooking. Everyone always loved that."

"So you moved here and started your café, getting away from the family homestead and striking out on your own."

"Exactly. I was happy with my life here and who I was. Then my brother pointed out the obvious, and I began to reexamine everything."

He hated to ask the question. "Do you think you so easily accepted Forrest's idea that you had powers for the simple fact you still yearned to fit in with your family?"

"No, it's nothing like that." She smiled and squeezed his hand. "Don't look so worried. I know you still don't believe in my powers, but that's okay. Just know I no longer believe they can control your love for me."

"So I guess you think you can still persuade me in other ways."

"Maybe."

He decided to file that away for another day. No longer able to keep her from his arms, he pulled her to him. She released a pent-up breath he hadn't realized she was holding and snuggled into his embrace.

"Does this mean you've forgiven me?"

He paused thoughtfully for a moment. "I suppose. But don't think you're getting out of your punishment."

Her eyes widened, and she gasped with indignation. "Punishment?"

"Oh yeah, let me tell you all about it." Arms wrapped around her shoulders, he drew her to her feet and headed toward the bedroom, whispering dark promises in her ear.

Rayne shivered in anticipation as he described how he planned to bend her over his lap and spank her full-rounded ass. Even hearing her bottom described in such a way didn't diminish the thrill as he spoke. She'd never been someone who thought she'd ever be interested in a spanking, but she couldn't deny the spark of excitement at the prospect, especially if it led to her getting fucked by him.

They entered the bedroom, and she stood uncertain as to what was going to happen next. When he sat down on the side of the bed, she realized he was going to go through with his promise. She only hoped she didn't disgrace herself. The funny thing was, she wasn't sure if she were more worried about crying out in pain or pleasure. What if she enjoyed it too much?

"There's no time like the present."

Scott's words startled her and she trembled slightly as she approached him. She didn't want to piss him off, but she had some serious concerns about the logistics of the situation. Before she could express them however, he told her to stop.

"Take down your panties for me. Slowly."

If she thought she'd been turned on before, his words had her skin flushed and her pussy moist and aching. Oh yeah, she was enjoying this way too much. After kicking off her shoes, she reached under her skirt, hooked her fingers into the scrap of lace resting high on her hips, and pushed her panties down her legs. "Was that what you wanted?"

"It's a start. Now hurry your sweet ass over here."

She took a deep breath and lay down over his lap, squirming a bit to find herself a comfortable position. It didn't help that she could feel his erection under her belly. Knowing this was affecting him just as much as it did her was exciting to say the least.

He leaned down and spoke into her ear, his breath hot against her neck. "You know I'm going to have to give you a few extra swats for all the wiggling you've been doing."

"Promises, promises."

His answering chuckle had a suggestion of wicked intent behind it. He grasped her skirt and pulled it up, exposing her thighs and ass to the cool air. She'd never felt so on display before.

He briefly massaged her full globes, and she struggled not to push back against his hand. Instead, she lowered her head and closed her eyes as she sank into the delightful caress.

"Spread your legs for me, baby."

She hadn't been expecting that, but his command didn't brook any disagreement. She silently opened herself for him. When his fingers stroked along her wet cleft, she bit back a groan and clenched her hands in the comforter.

"I think someone likes her punishment."

Licking her lips, she shot back. "You haven't given it to me yet."

The swat came without warning, warming her backside instantly. The breath whooshed from her lungs at the contact. He didn't give her time to recover, immediately swatting her ass again and again.

No longer lying there complacently, she began to wiggle again, the combination of pleasure and pain warring within her. His hand came down on her back, holding her down as he continued to spank her rear.

“Your ass turns pink so beautifully.” His hand moved from her ass to her pussy once again, this time penetrating the moist cavern with his fingers. “And you’re so damned hot I’m surprised you haven’t singed my hands.”

Her mouth was too dry to respond verbally, but she pressed back against his questing hand, driving his fingers deeper inside her. She was more than ready. She wanted him to fuck her, possess her, make her his.

“Have you had enough?”

She nodded her head, still unable to speak. “Good. Get up.”

Rayne quickly obeyed, wincing when her skirt brushed against her tender bottom. Her reaction wasn’t lost on Scott.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m sore.”

“Pain is a teacher. Did you learn your lesson, little girl?”

“Yes.”

“And what was it?”

Never agree to a punishment again, but of course she wasn’t going to say that. She wasn’t crazy. Besides, she knew exactly what Scott wanted to hear. “Never doubt you again.”

“That’s right. Now undress. I want you naked.”

“Undress?”

“Yes. I want to fuck you.” The desire in his voice laced every word. Not waiting to see if she followed his commands, he stood up and began to undress. For a brief moment she

watched as his toned body was revealed to her, one mouthwatering bit at a time. “Are you just going to watch me or join me?”

“Join. Definitely join.” There was no way she was going to miss out on this. She shook herself from the mesmerizing sight and pulled her T-shirt over her head and unhooked her bra, tossing them both aside. Thankfully her skirt had an elastic waist and she pulled it off with ease.

Turning back to Scott, she found him standing beside the bed watching her with a smile on his face. “Damn, I missed you. Don’t you ever pull a stunt like not trusting my love again, understand me?”

With a seductive smile she nodded. “Yes, sir.”

His eyes flared. “Oh, you are so getting it.”

“I certainly hope so.” She was more than ready for him, her pussy slick with the evidence of her desire. Since her ass was still a bit sore, she arranged herself on her hands and knees.

“You read my mind, baby. Are you sure that’s not your power?”

She laughed and shook her head. “Nope, but it didn’t take much to figure out where your mind is.”

He palmed her ass lightly, and she instinctively spread her legs, inviting a deeper caress. He had no trouble picking up on her encouraging movements, and his hand delved between her thighs. Her responding groan of satisfaction had him chuckling, but she wasn’t in the mood for delayed gratification.

“I know you love to tease, but I can’t wait. I need you. Now.”

“As much as I’d love to argue with you, I’m too close to tease either. Your punishment was enough foreplay for tonight.”

She turned to watch as he snagged a condom from the bedside table and quickly sheathed his cock. His eagerness only fueled her own desires. He took his cock in hand and

guided it into her drenched pussy. She sobbed with relief as he pushed forward to bury himself within her.

She savored the fullness of his cock filling her, knowing how close she'd been to losing this and him forever. Her actions could have cost her everything. She needed to tell him the words.

"I love you, Scott."

It was as if her words set off a firestorm within him. He pulled back only to plunge forward again, fucking her as if a man possessed. His movements were uncontrolled, but she loved every one of them.

"Never again," Scott said roughly as he powered into her. "You leave me...never again."

"Never." She vowed, willing to say, to do anything to ensure he wouldn't stop fucking her. "Please...I need..."

"What do you need?"

"You."

"Then take me, baby. Take all of me."

Each lust-filled cry that fell from Rayne's lips seemed to spur Scott on until he was pumping into her with backbreaking speed, just the way she loved it.

Rayne dug her nails into the comforter on the bed and held on with all her might. The way his pelvis slapped against her ass with every plunge had her pleasure-pain sensor veering off the chart. It hurt but it felt good all at the same time, adding an extra thrill to his thrusts.

"Fuck me, fuck me," she chanted over and over again, as he powered into her, begging for more.

Unable to support her weight on her shivering arms, Rayne dropped her torso down to the bed. If it weren't for the controlling grip Scott held on her hips, she would have fallen all the way, but he wouldn't let her break away from his hold.

Instead, he gripped her hips tighter and drove into her at an ungodly speed. The harder he plunged, the deeper he delved until the tip of his thick cock was rubbing against her cervix. Just when Rayne thought she couldn't handle another thrust, the new sensation sent her tumbling over the precipice of pleasure, and she came, screaming his name.

"God, yes," he gritted out. "Come for me."

"Yes. Yes. Yes." The pleasure rocked through her body, blinding her to everything but the intense sensation rocketing inside of her.

"Fuck baby, fuck." With a guttural groan he crushed her hips in his hands, drove his cock deep inside of her, and came. His body shook with his release, a sentiment Rayne echoed.

They collapsed together in a heap on the bed. His hand swept the hair from her face, and he stared thoughtfully at her. "I love you, baby. Always and forever."

"I love you too."

Epilogue

Forrest sat back in the chair, with a self-satisfied smirk gracing his lips. Josie wanted to slap the smile right off his face. The smug bastard always seemed to be harboring a secret. And she was one of those people who always needed to know what was going on.

It made for a bad combination. We just don't mix. It was as simple as that. Or it would be if it weren't for one tiny problem. She wanted him. There was no reason on Earth she should be attracted to a man who reminded her of a Gypsy, both in looks and attitude, but there it was. If he made a move, she'd take him up on it, no questions asked. Of course she'd feel like an ass ten seconds later, but at least by then her itch would have been scratched.

"Any particular reason you're staring at me?"

Forrest's question caught her off guard. She certainly didn't want him to know she'd been looking. He just might realize she was interested in him, even if it was only his body she wanted.

"Just wondering why you're sitting there with a silly-ass grin instead of helping me close up."

"Rayne and Scott made up."

"Riiight. And you know this because of your tarot card voodoo."

He'd begun to make it a habit to give tarot card readings at the café, and customers were actually starting to ask for them. Well, at least the female ones. It grated on her nerves he was changing the focus of the café and she was powerless to stop it. It wasn't as if she wanted to deny Rayne her right to a life outside the shop. She just wished that in order for that to happen her boss didn't have to hire her stupid brother and saddle Josie with the most irresponsible person on the planet.

Once again, the secretive little smile danced around his lips before he answered. "Let's just say I know."

"Whatever. I have work to do." She turned her back on him, intent on putting the temptation of him out of her mind.

He grabbed her arm, halting her escape. "You don't believe me?" He actually sounded shocked.

"Let's just say I have my doubts."

"Care to make a wager on it?"

"Love to."

"If I'm right, then for one day you have to do whatever I want, and if you win, I'll do whatever you want."

"Agreed."

As soon as the words were out of her mouth she regretted them. The old adage "if it looks too good to be true, it probably is" suddenly haunted her. She considered her options carefully. She had a fifty-fifty chance of being right, but knowing Forrest's luck of the devil, she'd be on the losing end.

Hopefully he wouldn't hold her to her hastily spoken words. As soon as she glanced into his eyes though, her hopes were dashed. That damned smile was back in place once more.

"I can't wait to collect."

She narrowed her gaze, wondering if she would fuck him or kill him before the end of the month.

THE END

Liz Andrews

Liz Andrews is a critically acclaimed, multi-published author who enjoys writing erotic romance almost as much as she enjoys reading it. A romantic at heart, Liz is a fierce believer in happily ever after and heroes who make the heart swoon. When not writing, the Ohio native enjoys reading, going to the movies and hosting dinner parties for her friends.

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